

OPPORTUNITIES SEIZED AND SQUANDERED: AN ANALYSIS OF
JOINT UNION AND CONFEDERATE OPERATIONS AT
NEW MADRID AND ISLAND NUMBER TEN

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by

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ABSTRACT

OPPORTUNITIES SEIZED AND SQUANDERED: AN ANALYSIS OF JOINT UNION AND CONFEDERATE OPERATIONS AT NEW MADRID AND ISLAND NUMBER TEN, by LCDR Jeffery J. Murawski, 145 pages.

The first year of the Civil War saw the struggle intensify as both Federal and Confederate militaries had to mobilize forces, install a command structure, and identify strategies for their geographic commanders. In the Western Theater of the war, both Northern and Southern strategies focused upon the Mississippi River as the center of gravity to their respective successes. Island Number Ten was the tenth island south of the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, and along with the small town of New Madrid, Missouri, was one of the string of fortifications that the Confederates constructed to keep the Union forces from taking control of the river and splitting the Confederacy. In the spring of 1862, Union forces under Major General John Pope brought 20,000 Union Soldiers in conjunction with a Navy flotilla of ironclad gunboats against the Confederate's fortifications and 7,000 soldiers. What ensued was six weeks of unique fighting with joint Confederate and Union forces taking part. The root cause of the decisive Union victory is broken down in to the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. These root causes, along with the leadership lessons throughout the levels show the enduring value of the analysis of the operations at New Madrid and Island Number Ten.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What today is generally called riverine operations have played a role in many of the United States' wars and smaller conflicts. These operations consist of offensive combat operations and security operations on inland rivers. Riverine operations have historically found themselves on the seams of the land and maritime commander's domains. These operations took place only during discrete periods and usually as a secondary or tertiary focus area for the Army or Navy. The lack of a dedicated joint doctrine for riverine warfare reflects these facts.¹ There are limited references to its execution in nine current joint publications.

The cyclical pattern that emerges with U.S. riverine operations is one reason for the lack of a current coherent joint doctrine. The United States undertook large-scale riverine operations in Vietnam throughout the Mekong Delta and in Iraq on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. In both cases, the riverine capability gap was identified, forces were developed, and roles and responsibilities for tactical execution established between the Army and Navy. The thirty years between these two conflicts had fluctuating budgets and no threat environment that justified the large force and robust capability developed from the operations in Vietnam. This forced the U.S. Navy to create a completely new riverine force in 2004-2005 for operations in Iraq.

¹ The term joint connotes activities, operations, organizations, etc., in which elements of two or more military departments participate. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, February 2016), 121.

The disregard for maintaining riverine capabilities and for the development of joint riverine doctrine during the interwar periods was also because they were not in the mainstream of the service communities that were responsible for their execution. The Navy's surface officers have always valued the "blue-water" combatant ship operations over any littoral or riverine operations. This has been the case since the era of sailing ships of the line, to battleships and cruisers of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Images of Trafalgar, John Paul Jones, and later Leyte Gulf occupy the romantic collective conscience of generations of surface warfare officers. Smaller ships with less capable sensors, less lethal weapons, operating on muddy rivers have never had the same appeal. Riverine operations were not part of Army operations between wars because the Navy took responsibility for them as the wars went on. Both Army and Navy officers avoided these operations with their intermittent periods of importance.

The lack of an enduring force structure and a consistent cultural stigma were also impediments that existed in 1861 at the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War. The need to execute combat operations on the Mississippi River and the other western rivers of the Mississippi River Valley were a key aspect to the early strategy of the Union and Confederacy. The generation of Army and Navy officers that participated in the Civil War experienced limited riverine style operations during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842) and the Mexican War (1846-1848). These operations resulted in some of the Civil War belligerents gaining experience, though no ships or gunboats from these conflicts still existed in 1861. Like the future U.S. wars in Vietnam and Iraq, the Union and Confederacy needed to develop riverine forces to execute their strategies as the war progressed. The afterthought of joint riverine warfare, however, became the centerpiece

in the Western and Trans-Mississippi theaters of the Civil War during its first two and a half years. Control of the Mississippi River would be the focal point in the west, culminating on 4 July 1863 with the Confederate surrender of the fortifications and garrison at Vicksburg, Mississippi.

In the middle of those first two and a half years of the war along the Mississippi, there are six weeks of operations in the spring of 1862 located where Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee meet across the Mississippi River. During these six weeks, joint Union and Confederate forces grappled for the control of the small southeastern Missouri town of New Madrid and the fortifications around an Island in the Mississippi River then known as Island Number Ten. The small number of casualties and the fact that the action took place at the same time as the first major bloody battle of the war, Shiloh, has made these operations a footnote in the history of the Civil War. Both operations took place in the same geographical department for the Union and Confederacy. This meant that the secondary operations at New Madrid and Island Number Ten lack the historical weight of Civil War royalty like Union Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman and Confederate Generals Albert Sydney Johnston and Pierre G.T. Beauregard.

Overlooked or not, the operations of the joint Union and Confederate forces at New Madrid and Island Number Ten were key operations that opened the Mississippi River to the joint Union incursion from the north that was the vital enabler to the final investment and surrender of Vicksburg. The six-weeks of operations are one of the few examples of the Union and Confederate joint forces fighting against one another. The operations ended with a decisive Union victory. The Confederate force defending the area surrendered to the joint Union force led by Major General John Pope and Flag

Officer Andrew Foote after inflicting less than two hundred casualties. There was not a single determining factor for this one-sided victory. The foundations of these far-reaching operations are multiple factors that can be analyzed at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war.²

The first step to identifying these factors and understanding how the three levels of war interplayed to determine the outcome is by addressing the historical context of the operations. This includes reviewing the development of the Union and Confederate joint forces in the western theater and analyzing the first year of joint operations on the western rivers.

The second step in understanding the operations is the depiction and analysis of the six weeks of operations in detail. The narrative goes through the distinct chapters of the operations: the Union Army taking New Madrid, the Union Navy squaring off against Island Number Ten, and then the joint Union operations that ended with the capitulation of the Confederate forces in the area. Throughout the six-week period, the narrative also highlights several unique episodes of individual or unit exploits that affected the outcome of the operations.

Finally, the historical context and the narrative of the operations are broken down into the root causes of the outcome of the operations at the strategic, operational, and

² The strategic level of war is the level at which a nation determines national strategic security objectives and guidance, then develops and uses national resources to achieve those objectives. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 1-02, 227. The operational level of war is the level at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to achieve strategic objectives within theaters or other operational areas. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 1-02, 176. The tactical level of war is the level at which battles and engagements are planned and executed to achieve military objectives assigned to tactical units or task forces. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 1-02, 234.

tactical levels. The strategic level of analysis focuses on the flawed application of the Confederate defensive strategy for the defense of the Mississippi River. The operational level focuses on the overmatch that the Union Army and Navy enjoyed in soldiers, sailors, and equipment. The tactical level assessment focuses on the will to fight of the leaders and soldiers on each side. Also addressed is the theme of the impact of leadership at the tactical and operational level. This last human aspect of the operations is not only as important as the others are, but is more translatable to any future leader during circumstances when two forces oppose one another facing death for their respective causes.

This unique, underappreciated story and associated analysis is worth the modern reader's time, as alluded to in a recent article that lamented the shortage of U.S. military history about joint and combined operations.³ The operations illuminate aspects of the Union quest for control of the Mississippi River Valley that have been previously unidentified. The analysis and respective conclusions have value to the military professional and Civil War enthusiast.

³ David F. Winkler, "If We Fight Joint, Shouldn't Our History Reflect That?" *Joint Forces Quarterly* 81 (2nd Quarter 2016): 118-23.

CHAPTER 2

DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATIONS OF JOINT UNION FORCES ON THE WESTERN RIVERS, JANUARY 1861-JANUARY 1862

Island Number Ten is one of the handful of operations in the Civil War where joint operations played a direct role in the outcome outside of mere transportation of soldiers. Breaking down the operations at New Madrid and Island Number Ten entails more than the details of the six weeks that they occurred. The first year of the war preceding the action at New Madrid contains the context that allows for the identification of the root causes of the operations at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. The strategic context is brought to light through the Union and Confederate strategies in the west. The operational context comes from the early joint operations on the western rivers. The tactical context comes from the development of the forces that would take part in New Madrid and Island Number Ten, and by the experiences of those same forces before New Madrid. The historical context at each level, when combined with the details of the operations at New Madrid and Island Number Ten are the basis for understanding the root causes of the outcome of the operations at each level of war.

Early Federal Strategy: Anaconda

By the time Republican President-elect Abraham Lincoln assumed the office on 4 March 1861, seven slave states of the Deep South had already seceded. President Lincoln and his new cabinet along with the General of the Army, Winfield Scott, began to think seriously about the possibility of using force to keep the Union together. Scott was the pre-eminent war hero in the country, serving valiantly in the War of 1812 and leading the

U.S. forces during the Mexican War. He was also seventy-four at the outbreak of the war.⁴ His initial conception for the strategic direction for Federal forces consisted of a naval blockade of the entire southern coastline, while at the same time taking control of the Mississippi River, allowing the Federal forces to divide and strangle the South. This called for a protracted application of military force that would slowly take its toll upon the South. There could have been no seeing into the future in those early days of the rebellion. Neither General Scott nor President Lincoln could have envisioned what the next four years of warfare would look like. While Scott's plan appeared feasible on paper, several northern journalists criticized the plan because of its apparent lack of offensive initiative, caricaturing it in an editorial with a snake around the South, giving birth to the name Anaconda Plan.⁵ This was an ironic reaction to the plan of Winfield Scott. The expectations of both northern and southern populations and media were based upon U.S. exploits during the Mexican War, of which Winfield Scott was, along with Zachary Taylor, one of the two primary heroes. The two-year period of the Mexican War entailed an offensive U.S. strategy throughout, with the Army forces generally prevailing while outnumbered by their Mexican counterparts.⁶ This relatively short and offensive war was the baseline that most civilians drew from when thinking about how the action

⁴ Charles P. Stone, "Washington on the Eve of The War," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (New York: Castle Books, 1886), 8-10.

⁵ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988), 333-334.

⁶ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (New York: Da Capo, 1982), 83-85.

of the coming Civil War would look. The reality was that the United States had defeated a larger, but poorly equipped, trained, and led force while being able to rely on maritime superiority and a lack of public will in Mexico to control the action. It should take nothing away from what Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor accomplished in Mexico, but Scott knew better than anyone at the outbreak of the rebellion that the framework for that victory could not be forced upon the circumstances and peoples of the northern and southern states.

This Anaconda Plan was the vague entering argument of strategic thought for the United States in the Civil War. With no general staff or body for doctrine development, there was no institutional process for the practice of operational art on the Federal or Confederate sides. The transition mechanism guiding strategic thought to the operational and tactical levels did not exist. This fact, along with the expansion of the U.S. Army from 16,367 regulars prior to the war to an eventual end strength of a little over one million Federal soldiers left a substantial void between the initial strategy and the start of combat operations.⁷

At the outbreak of the war, President Lincoln appointed four generals below General Scott to be in control of four geographic departments in an effort to have senior, experienced military officers take charge of the Federal strategy in each of the departments. These individuals were all appointed to the rank of Major General of United States Volunteers: John Fremont, Robert Anderson, Irvin McDowell, and George B.

⁷ Stone, 7.

McClellan. These generals were placed in command of the Departments of the West, Kentucky, Ohio, and Washington, respectively.⁸

Fremont had an eclectic background. He had formal military experience, and a large reputation for the controversial role he played in securing California before and during the war with Mexico. He arrived at his headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri, on 25 July 1861.⁹ Before any grand plans for the Mississippi River could be acted upon, the key border states of Missouri and Kentucky had to be secured. Kentucky declared itself neutral, but could not stay out of the action for long. Missouri was more complicated. The secessionist governor, Claiborne Fox Jackson, and state legislature fled south because Federal forces controlled St. Louis and the surrounding countryside at the outbreak of the war. Fremont's tenure as commander of the Department of the West ended up being short-lived as the Federals were defeated at Wilson's Creek on 10 August, and the Federal garrison at Lexington surrendered on 20 September 1861. Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon, an aggressive but very competent commander who was responsible for securing the St. Louis Arsenal, eastern Missouri and the Missouri River Valley in the face of secessionist forces, died in the Battle at Wilson's Creek. These losses in soldiers and leaders weakened the perception of Fremont from Washington, which was also beginning to be tarnished by multiple reports of his financial and administrative mismanagement. Fremont then overstepped his bounds attempting to enforce a proclamation extending

⁸ John C. Fremont, "In Command in Missouri," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (New York: Castle Books, 1886), 278-288.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 279.

marshal law over the state of Missouri and freeing all the slaves in Missouri.¹⁰ The president quickly overturned this edict not wanting to alienate the other Border States, especially Kentucky. These combined factors led to Fremont's relief as commander of the Department of the Missouri on 24 October 1861 and setting the stage for Henry W. Halleck to take over the newly named Department of Missouri in November. Fremont had a collection of shortfalls, but by the time he was relieved he established the conditions for the successes to come over the next six months. The Department of the West had only 16,000 effective soldiers when he arrived, but by the time he was relieved he had tripled that number working diligently with Washington and the western state governors.¹¹ He had also placed capable leaders like Brigadier Generals Ulysses S. Grant and John Pope in command at key locations, solidified a line of defense from St. Louis, Missouri, to Ohio along the Ohio River, and acquired the first river ships that eventually formed the first Western Gunboat Flotilla.¹²

While the president, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, and the Army organization in the west attempted to create a new force and get organized, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles laid out the Navy's strategy and direction. Welles was a steady force within the Department of the Navy who gave clear guidance and effectively worked with

¹⁰ U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1890-1901), vol. 3, 466-467. Henceforth referred to as *OR*.

¹¹ Fremont, 281-283.

¹² *Ibid.*, 278-288.

the president to develop and execute strategy.¹³ Even though General Winfield Scott only remained Commanding General of the Army until 1 November 1861, his Anaconda plan was the basis for the naval strategy that Welles began implementing during the early stages of the war.

Welles and the Navy writ large understood how to execute an effective blockade, though they had to reorganize their forces and begin to create more ships capable of that mission. Welles addressed those shortfalls over time with methods that were well defined by the Navy and the shipbuilders of the era. The other aspect of the Anaconda plan that had to be addressed was how to control the Mississippi River. This part of the Plan was foreign to the blue-water mentality of the Navy of 1860, which had no forces capable of sustained combat operations along the inland rivers.

The Navy's experience since the War of 1812 was more varied than its Army counterparts. The Army leaders of the Civil War drew almost exclusively from the Mexican War for their combat experience. Outside of that period, most Army officers were garrisoned somewhere in the United States, with some taking part in action along the frontiers against various Native American tribes. The Navy on the other hand, operated during the first half of the nineteenth century in a similar manner to how it operated during the Civil War. The Navy had squadrons that performed various missions around the world: Pacific, Mediterranean, African, Brazilian, etc. While these were certainly not all combat roles, the large ships of the line of the U.S. Navy produced

¹³ John Niven, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 326-345.

officers who were accustomed to the role that the blockading forces would play in the Civil War.

There was considerably less experience in the officer corps of the Navy with anything that looked like the Civil War operations along the Mississippi. The one analogy that the Army and Navy had in common was the Mexican War. The Navy performed transportation, blockading, fires support, and amphibious missions during the Mexican War. The Navy's home squadron operated off the eastern coast of Mexico to blockade and attack the Mexican ports on that coast during the two-year period. The Navy also bought three small river schooners at the outset of the war, which they outfitted with one smooth-bore 32 pounder cannon, for operations in and around the Mexican coast and rivers.¹⁴ Three more of these ships were later employed the second year of operations. While these small ships did not compare in many ways to the later wood and ironclad gunboats of the Civil War, their operations and use were close to what some of the same officers on board them in the Mexican War would do less than twenty years later along the western rivers of the United States.¹⁵

This experience, blue and brown water, also highlights an important distinction between the Army and Navy through the start and initial stages of the Civil War. While the Navy expanded in relative terms as the Army did, the unit of measure between the two services had an important distinction. The Army expanded by volunteer regiments in each state. The governors of each state awarded the commissions, but most regiments

¹⁴ Jay Slagle, *Ironclad Captain: Seth Ledyard Phelps and the U.S. Navy, 1841-1864* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996), 45.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 45-55.

voted for their own officers, and not necessarily based upon their military experience or competence. The Navy's unit of measure was a ship, regardless of size. The Navy was capable of building ships and placing officers in command of any size warship that had decades of service all over the world. The lower ranks of officers and a substantial percentage of the enlisted ranks would be new to the Navy, but all Union ships would have experienced naval officers leading it. The most junior commanding officer along the Mississippi at the start of the war had nearly twenty years of continuous naval service, along with two of his junior officers.¹⁶ This was a substantial difference between the new Army regiments with no form of experience heading into their first engagements. The Federal Navy's experienced officer distribution had a closer analogy in how the Confederate Army parsed out their experienced officers to their native state units. There were certainly still numerous all-volunteer Confederate regiments created, but the Confederacy did not keep the Regular Army forces separate as the Union Army did.

The Federal naval officer corps was one of the few known commodities for Welles and the Department of the Navy. The command and control of the ships that would operate on the western rivers was one of the unknowns. The U.S. Navy had operated on the Great Lakes during the American Revolution and War of 1812, but had not operated in a combat role on the inland waterways of the United States. The Army at that time claimed jurisdiction on all inland operations, including those on the rivers. This made for a collection of murky relationships throughout the early days of the development and execution of operations between the Army and Navy. This conflict

¹⁶ Slagle, 51.

would finally be addressed late in 1863 as all of the naval forces operating on the western rivers were transferred to the Navy. Until that time though, the Army and Navy leaders in the west would work together while they both reported to the Army department commander.

The lack of a clear chain of command for Federal Army and Navy forces working together was the first impediment that would have to be overcome *in situ* by leaders in the field. The other obstacle was the complete lack of anything that resembled doctrine for joint Army and Navy operations. The Army itself had little doctrine outside of drill. The Army and Navy benefited from the joint experience of the Mexican War, but that action was not constrained by the geometry and opposing forces that the Union would face on the western rivers. Leaders of the Army and Navy would have to overcome these operational obstacles, especially in the first year of the war.

Creation of the Western Gunboat Flotilla

With the officers and the command and control structure identified, Welles had to figure out how to procure or create the ships and forces that would support the Army along the western rivers. These tasks fell upon an eclectic collection of people who worked together with varying degrees of success. Welles' first step was to assign a naval liaison to work with the Army commanders in Ohio to begin procuring and outfitting existing ships for river service. The officer chosen for this task was Commander John Rogers. In the pre-Civil War Navy, the highest rank within the service was a captain, or O-6, who could be upgraded to commodore due to his billet. There were no admirals in

the relatively small and independent U.S. Navy.¹⁷ In the context of the twenty-first century U.S. Navy, a surface warfare commander has between sixteen to twenty-two years of experience, of which two-thirds of that time is spent assigned to a ship. In contrast, John Rogers reported to his first ship in 1829 when he was 17. He then spent the next thirty-plus years in the Navy, served on ten different ships, and operated all over the world. He was the son of Commodore John Rogers, one of the naval heroes of the Revolutionary War and War of 1812.¹⁸ He brought this shipboard experience, along with the time he had served at the Washington Navy Yard, to Cincinnati where he reported in May of 1861.¹⁹ Major General McClellan was in command of the Department of the Ohio, and Rogers would work with him to pay for the forces he was requisitioning and building.

McClellan was accommodating in those early days in authorizing almost all of the purchases of Rogers, and on 8 June 1861, three river steamers were purchased in Cincinnati that became the first ships of the Western Gunboat Flotilla, later in the war known as the Mississippi Squadron.²⁰ These ships were modified under the supervision of one of the Navy's key constructors, or shipbuilding supervisors, Samuel Pook.²¹ The

¹⁷ William B. Cogar, *Dictionary of Admirals of the U.S. Navy, Volume I: 1862-1900* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989), xi-xvi.

¹⁸ Cogar, 149-150.

¹⁹ Slagle, 115.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

²¹ U.S. War Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 31 vols. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1895-1929), vol. 22, 281. Henceforth referred to as *ORN*.

river steamboats were outfitted with five-inch oak panels on the exterior of the ship, the steam engineering plant was upgraded, and beams were added to accommodate the weight of the naval guns to be installed. With no available iron to be used on the exterior at the time, the oak paneling would have to do, giving these first three ships the moniker of “timberclads.” These timberclads would become the USS *Tyler* (later *Taylor*), the USS *Lexington*, and the USS *Conestoga*. These ships would have varying armaments that would be adjusted throughout the war. Initially, *Conestoga* had four 32-pounder smooth bore cannons, *Lexington* had two 32-pounder smooth bore and four eight-inch smooth bore guns, and *Tyler* had six 8-inch smooth bore and one 32-pounder smooth bore.²² These ships had to compete with the low waters of the Ohio River where they had been refitted, and were not fully armed and ready to be taken down the river to the most southern Union strongpoint on the Mississippi River at Cairo, Illinois, until 12 August 1861.²³

At the same time as Rogers went west to work with the Army and begin the procurement process, plans were beginning for the development of the ironclad gunboats that eventually became the backbone of U. S. Navy forces on the western waters. These ironclad gunboats were the brainchild of James Eads from St. Louis. Eads was a self-made man whose fortune came from his development of unique salvage ships that were designed as catamarans capable of retrieving cargo and wrecks from the Mississippi River. He also created a diving apparatus that allowed him to be the first person to walk

²² Cogar, 158-159.

²³ U.S. War Department, *ORN*, vol. 22, 297.

along the bed of the Mississippi River.²⁴ At the outbreak of the war, he was struck with the idea to create small ironclad gunboats similar to his salvage ships. He was a friend of former Missouri Attorney General and then U.S. Attorney General Edward Bates, who introduced him to Gideon Welles on 17 April 1861.²⁵ Eads was invited to Washington to discuss his plans with Welles and then directed to also discuss them with Samuel Pook. Pook took Eads' ideas and turned them into ship drawings that were capable of being used by shipbuilders. The ships were a substantial departure from any current ship in the world, even the ironclad *Monitor*, which would share some similarities with the much-smaller gunboats. The ships had a low profile, relatively wide beam, and a shallow draft. To some they resembled a turtle-like shape, which garnered them the nickname of Pook's turtles.²⁶

The Army and Navy finally agreed upon the design worked on by Pook and Eads, and put the contract to create seven ironclad gunboats out for bidding in August 1861.²⁷ Eads easily won the contract for building the ships with his experience and resources. Eads' genius was not only in the creative ideas for the ships, but also in putting those plans into reality. He devised a plan to build the seven ships in seven different northern

²⁴ Florence Dorsey, *Road to Sea: The Story of James B. Eads and the Mississippi* (New York: 1947), 2-25.

²⁵ James Buchanan Eads, "Recollections of Foote and the Gun-Boats," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (New York: Castle Books, 1886)338.

²⁶ Paul H. Silverstone, *Warships of the Civil War Navies* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989), 151.

²⁷ Eads, 338.

cities. There was no single shipyard on the western rivers that could handle the task of building the ships.²⁸ The cities that this process took place in would later become the names of this new class of ship. The *Cairo*, *Carondelet*, *Mound City*, *Pittsburgh*, *St. Louis*, *Cincinnati*, and *Louisville* would be the ships known as the City-class.



Figure 1. USS *Mound City*

Source: Naval Heritage and History Command, “USS Mound City (1862-1865),” U.S. Navy, accessed 17 April 2016, <http://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-72000/NH-72806.html>, image NH 72806.

²⁸ Gary Joiner, *Mr. Lincoln’s Brown Water Navy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 27-28.

They were a novel design, somewhere between the CSS *Virginia* and the salvage ships Eads had built for the Mississippi. The ships were 175 feet in length had over a 51-foot beam. Two steam-powered engines were oriented at the center of the ships and powered twin paddle wheels amidships propelled the ships to a max speed of nine miles per hour. The wheels were within the interior of the hull to make them less vulnerable as the timberclad wheels were.²⁹ The ships were outfitted with thirteen guns that were a mixture of smooth bore and rifled cannons. There were three forward batteries, four on each broadside, and two stern batteries. The forward hull was covered with 2.5-inch iron plating that extended back to the most aft gun port. The pilothouse on top of the main deck of the ship was covered in 1.5-inch plating, which was capable of stopping rifle fire, but nothing larger. The aft part of the ship and the decks were not covered with plating due to weight trade-offs through the development process. This would be a key weakness as the ships were susceptible to plunging fire from locations high above the river and would have to be very careful about the ships' orientation and direction of river flow to not allow the aft part of the ship to be exposed.³⁰

There was nothing like these ironclad gunboats in the world, but they were far from perfect. They were slow compared to the possible river currents, sometimes unwieldy in strong currents, loud, and generally smelled bad.³¹ However, they were also the most powerful floating batteries on the rivers at the disposal of either side in the war.

²⁹ Silverstone, 151-152.

³⁰ U.S. War Department, *ONR*, vol. 22, 278.

³¹ Joiner, 29.

The City Class gunboats were completed six months after the awarding of the contract to Eads and were accepted on 15 January 1862.³² That fact alone should garner Eads recognition, especially when the feat of creating an entire new ship class at multiple locations is compared against the over-runs and shortfalls of ship building in the twenty-first century.

The last two ships in the Western Gunboat Flotilla would come from ships that Eads currently had in his civilian company's inventory. General Fremont ordered these two on 15 October 1861 while Rogers and Eads worked on the production of the other flotilla ships. The first was a salvage ship that eventually became the USS *Benton*. Over two hundred feet long, twenty feet wider than the City-class, with 3.5-inch hull plating, and sixteen guns made the *Benton* the most powerful ship on the western rivers.³³ The other ship was a converted river steamer that would be initially named the *New Era*, and later renamed the *Essex*. William D. Porter was the first captain of the *Essex*, and renamed it in honor of the ship his father had commanded during the War of 1812.³⁴ It was shorter and more lightly armed than the City-class ships, but would be valuable throughout the war. These twelve ships constituted the initial Western Gunboat Flotilla, and were ready for action in early 1862.³⁵

³² Eads, 339.

³³ Silverstone, 155.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Eads, 340-341.

These ships were commanded by U. S. Navy officers, had civilian river pilots as part of the crew, and had a combination of old tars (experienced enlisted men) and experienced river workers as the crews. The manning of these ships fell upon the initial officers of the flotilla to report to Rogers. They were forced to recruit in the river towns along the Ohio and Mississippi due to shortfalls in the Navy as the force expanded. The Army furnished soldiers to the U.S. Navy the first six months of operations when it could. This was important in the fall of 1861 and spring of 1862 as the Navy struggled to man as the ships that were being produced.

Captain Andrew Hull Foote relieved Commander Rogers late in 1861, and by the spring of 1862 the ships and leadership were in place to support the Federal Army in its initial offensive push south along the western rivers. Like Rogers, Foote was an experienced officer who had spent most of his life in the Navy. He had joined the Navy at the age of 16 in 1822, and went on to serve on eleven different ships in the nearly forty years of continuous naval service. He had distinguished himself over the years through his performance against the African slave trade, as a reformist for drinking aboard ships, and leading a raid against the city of Canton, China in 1856. He was a man universally respected for his pious and professional nature.³⁶ Foote was also promoted to the new rank of flag officer after reporting. All his peers on the Army side were brigadier generals and above, and the Navy did not want that discrepancy to impact his ability to cooperate with them.³⁷

³⁶ Cogar, 63-64.

³⁷ Gustavus Fox, *Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, 1861-1865* (New York: Naval Historical Society, 1918), 9.

Early Confederate Strategy

While the Union mobilized and attempted to piece together a war time Army and Navy, the Confederacy attempted the same endeavor. Confederate President Jefferson Davis had to identify his overall military strategy. His political objective was to establish safety and sovereignty for his new nation. Militarily this could be married to that political objective in a variety of ways, but several factors limited the military leaders. These included limited resources, infrastructure, naval capability and capacity, and political stress from the individual states. In the face of these limitations, the Confederate President began like his northern adversary had, by dividing the Confederacy into departments and assigning generals that would be in charge of the strategy and forces in those regions.

Major General Leonidas Polk was the initial commander that was placed in charge of Confederate Department Number Two. The Department was composed of Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, and northern Mississippi. General Albert Sydney Johnston later superseded Polk in September of 1861, but the strategy for the department remained generally the same through both men's tenures.³⁸ Both attempted to fortify a defensive line through those states, and then build a collection of fortifications along the Mississippi to deny access to the Union along the river and associated rail lines of communications traversing the Confederacy east to west. These river fortifications were at strategic points where the Confederacy attempted to dominate both sides of the river based upon geometry. These locations included Columbus,

³⁸ Joiner, 33.

Kentucky, Island Number Ten and New Madrid, Fort Pillow, Tennessee, and Vicksburg, Mississippi.³⁹

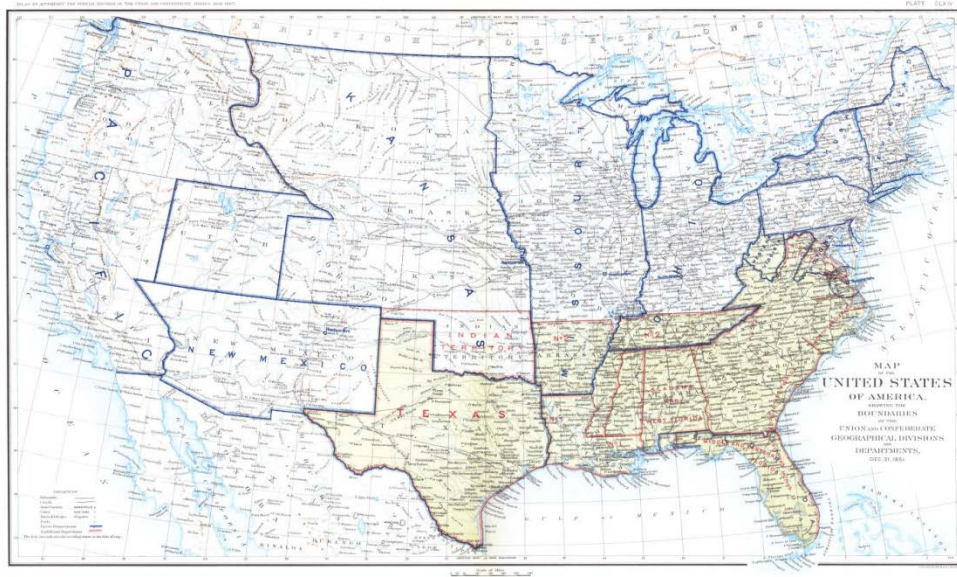


Figure 2. Union and Confederate Departments, December 1861

Source: U.S. War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1891-1895), plate 164.

The Confederate Navy was at a greater disadvantage at the start of the war than its Army counterparts. Forty-five U.S. Navy officers resigned their commissions to enter the Confederate Navy.⁴⁰ The South had no warships of its own, though the Confederate

³⁹ Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, “The Campaign of Shiloh,” in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (New York: Castle Books, 1886), 570.

⁴⁰ Naval History and Heritage Command, “Officers List,” U.S. Navy, accessed 12 January 2016, <http://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/manuscripts/o/officers-list-who-resigned-at-the-outbreak-of-the-civil-war.html>.

forces captured the shipbuilding facilities in Norfolk, Virginia, at the outset of the war. The Confederacy had a small fraction of commercial vessels compared to the Union's merchant marine. These limitations led Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory to prioritize what he would be able to build and achieve. He focused on ways to evade the growing Federal blockade and look towards other asymmetric options like torpedoes (sea mines) that the Confederacy could use to their advantage. The Confederacy would never be able to compete with the Union in a blue water capacity, and relied on attempting to buy frigates and revenue cutters from Europe.⁴¹ The Confederate Navy was able to famously refit the Union USS *Merrimac*, renaming it CSS *Virginia*, which participated in its duel with union ironclad *Monitor*. However, the Confederate Navy would never have anything resembling parity with the Union. On the western rivers, the Confederacy did not have the leadership, personal ingenuity, or industrial capability to attempt anything resembling what Eads and the U.S. Navy undertook in 1861. The Confederates would have some early success with ships designed as rams, but essentially, there would be a very limited Confederate Navy presence the first two years of the war along the upper Mississippi, Tennessee, and Cumberland Rivers. The Confederacy relied on its Army to defend its new country, and that Army was betting all on its ability to defend the south using its river fortifications, much like the United States did in the early nineteenth century with its collection of coastal fortifications.

⁴¹ McPherson, 314-315.

Belmont

On 28 August 1861, newly promoted Brigadier General Ulysses Grant was ordered by General Fremont to take command of the southeast portion of Missouri and southern Illinois, with his headquarters in Cairo, Illinois.⁴² Grant was in charge of supporting operations in Missouri that included operations against pro-Southern Missouri Militia leader Jeff Thompson and operations against the more conventional pro-Confederate Missouri State Guard forces of General Sterling Price. He was also in a position to encounter the Confederate forces that encroached on the western portion of neutral Kentucky. The Confederate troops moved into Kentucky first, including taking Columbus, Kentucky, and eventually pushing farther east to Bowling Green.

⁴² Grant, 133.

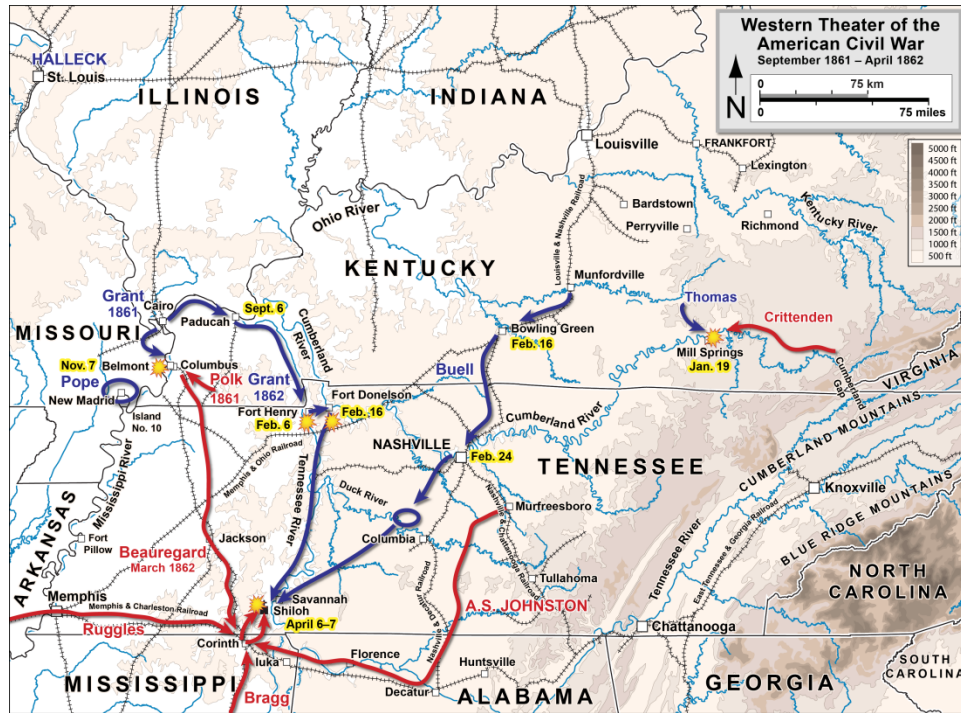


Figure 3. Western Theater, September 1861-December 1862

Source: Map by Hal Jespersen, “Western Theater of the American Civil War,” accessed 17 April 2016, <http://www.cwmaps.com/freemaps/ACW%20Western%20Theater%20September%201861%20-%20April%201862.png>.

Columbus was only fifteen miles south of Cairo, and after intelligence of the Confederates moving on Paducah, Kentucky. Grant overnight moved two regiments of volunteers over the Ohio River forty-five miles to occupy the city hours before the small Confederate force. Paducah was another strategic point along the rivers at the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers. Brigadier General C. F. Smith then secured Smithland at the mouth of the Cumberland River.⁴³ This was the strategic landscape in November of 1861 as Federal forces under Major General Halleck and his subordinate Brigadier

⁴³ Fremont, 284-286.

General Grant at Cairo were in a position to begin a joint offensive campaign as General Scott had envisioned the year before.

The first battle of any significance that would have the participation of the newly created Union Army and Navy units would be a small town called Belmont, Missouri, across the Mississippi River from Columbus, Kentucky. Columbus had been fortified on its natural embankment on the Kentucky side of the river and was armed with forty guns. It was nicknamed the Gibraltar of the Mississippi, though that moniker would be attached to other locations along the great river as the war progressed.

On 7 November, Grant moved against the Confederate forces encamped at Belmont which he was told were to reinforce 3000 Confederate troops in southeast Missouri. Grant moved from Cairo down the Mississippi with a collection of packet boats (river steamers of shallow draft usually employed in mail or personnel transportation) carrying 2500 Union soldiers and escorted by the timberclads *Taylor* and *Lexington*.⁴⁴ Grant's troops initially surprised the encamped enemy forces that were of a comparable size to those of the Union. At the same time though, 2000 Confederate reinforcements from Columbus had landed south of Belmont. This force counterattacked the Union forces, driving them east towards their ships. Grant showed the resolve and coolness that served him throughout the war when he directed his green commanders that "they had cut their way in and they could cut their way out just as well."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Henry Walke, *Naval Scenes and Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: F. R. Reed and Company, 1877), 31.

⁴⁵ Grant, 141.

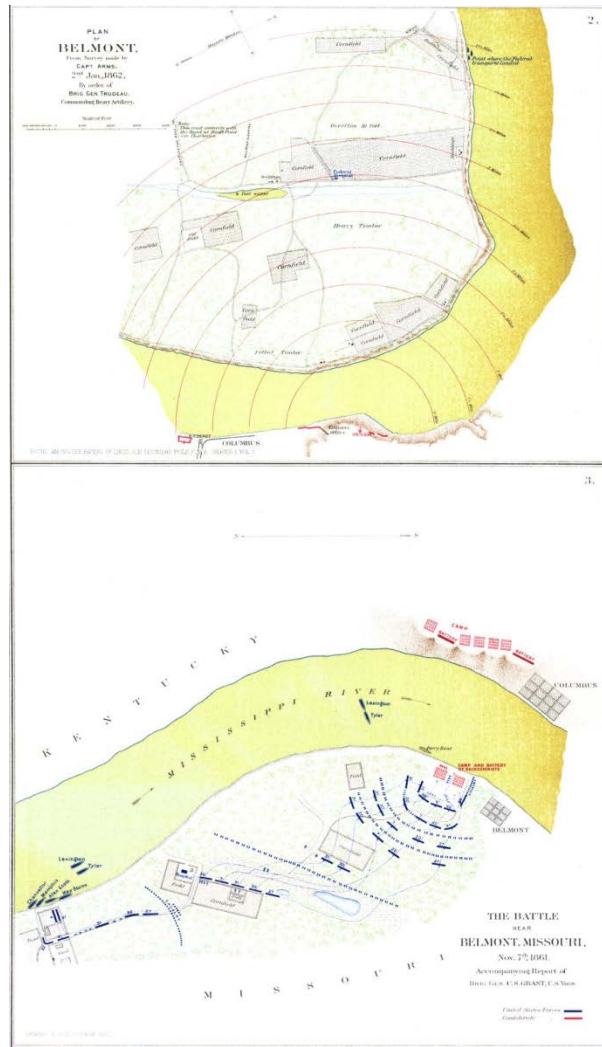


Figure 4. The Battle of Belmont

Source: U.S. War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1891-1895), plate 4.

Grant's forces fought their way back to the river and extracted their remaining forces while under the cover of the fire of the gunboats. A correspondent from the *New York Herald* on one of the transports reported, "Their shells fell like meteors into the rebel ranks, demolishing whole squadrons of artillery at a broadside, and throwing the

rebels into confusion worse confounded.”⁴⁶ Another correspondent for the *Ohio State Journal* onboard the transport *Rob Roy* reported “Over seventy rounds of canister, ball, and shell were poured into their ranks from the two gunboats in less than thirty minutes, without which it may be doubted whether our force would not have been cut off.”⁴⁷

Both Confederate and Union participants looked at Belmont as a victory when reporting the aftermath up their respective chains of command and to the public. While not a tactical victory, Grant’s strategic goal of inhibiting the Confederate movement across the Mississippi to reinforce Jeff Thompson’s forces was achieved.⁴⁸ For the Confederates though, this was a victory like Manassas or Wilson’s Creek. They drove Union forces from the field of battle, and were congratulated by the Confederate Congress for such.⁴⁹ The casualties on both sides differ based upon the source. The *Official Records* for both sides holds the casualties at 485 Union and 642 Confederate, though both of these numbers are disputed in several accounts.⁵⁰ The exact numbers are not critical here, but they played a part in how both sides sold the account. Regardless, the Confederate losses were most likely higher, with about twice as many soldiers on the field throughout the day.

⁴⁶ Walke, *Naval Scenes*, 38.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁴⁸ Grant, 143.

⁴⁹ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 3, 312.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 307-310.

This was not Manassas or Wilson's Creek though. The Union was not driven off in a chaotic manner and disgraced. The Federal forces under Grant kept their cool after the battle turned and retrograded out of the field to fight again another day. Inexperienced soldiers on both sides gained valuable combat exposure. Belmont also marked the beginning of the familiarity of the Federal Army and Navy forces working together. While on a relatively small scale, the support of the timberclad gunboats and the effect of their guns upon the Confederates stood tall in Grant's memoirs. The Union ability to leverage the river for maneuver saw its start at Belmont and would continue successfully for the next five months prior to the operations at Island Number Ten.

Fort Henry

Two days after the action at Belmont, Major General Henry Halleck took command of the Department of the Missouri.⁵¹ General Fremont's careless administration and questionable leadership left the department in a sorry state, and it would take substantial effort and time for Halleck to turn things around. Halleck's strengths though lay in the administration and organizational management. This was fortunate for the turnaround in efficiency that was necessary, but his talents as a general would remain in an office, not in the field. Halleck's hesitancy to go on the offensive was one of his defining characteristics until he was taken out of his operational command and stationed in Washington to become an advisor to the president and secretary of war, and administrator of the Army as chief of staff. Halleck's reorganization and aversion to offensive risk lasted until joint Union forces moved down the Tennessee River to attack

⁵¹ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 3, 567.

the Confederate forces early in 1862. The two significant changes in this three-month period after Belmont were the development of the Confederate defenses of fortifications on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, known as Forts Henry and Donelson, and on the Union side the completion of the Western Gunboat Flotilla in January.

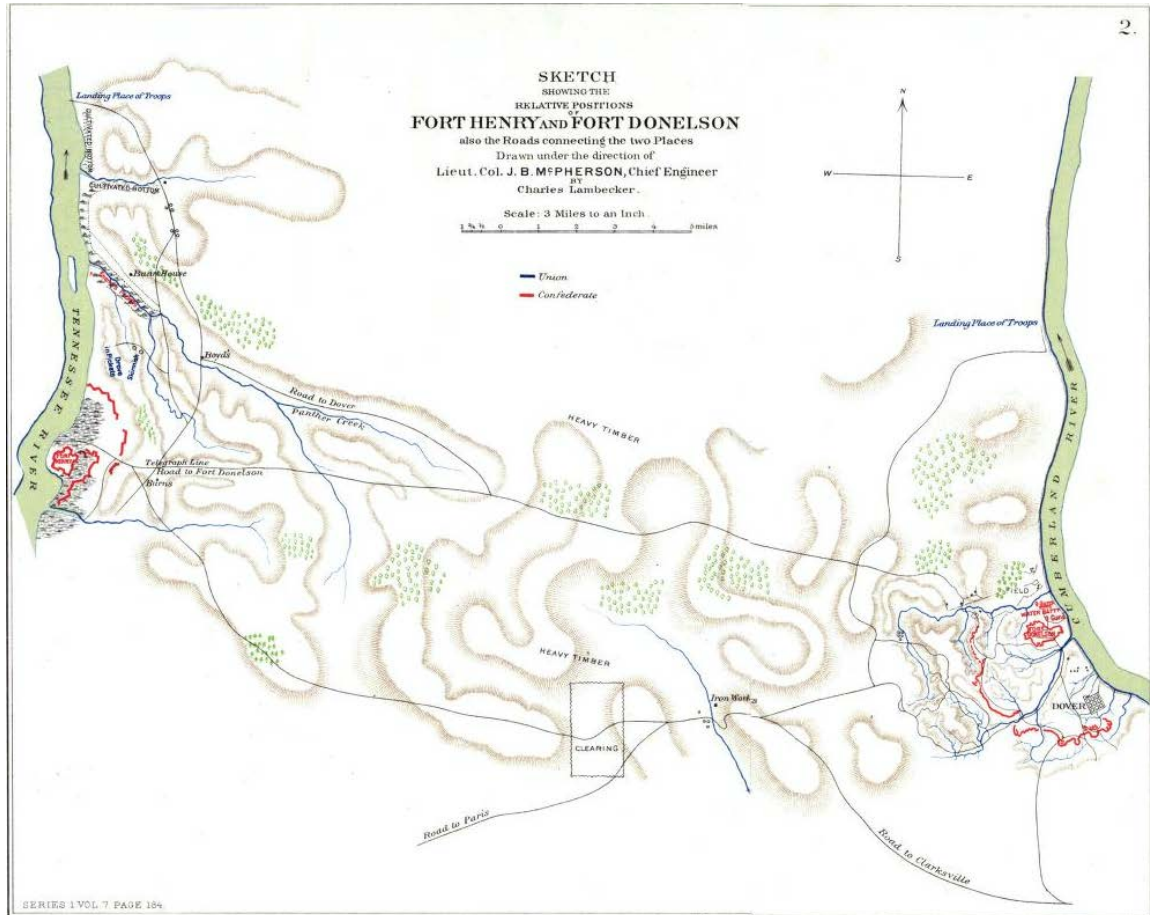


Figure 5. Fort Henry and Fort Donelson

Source: U.S. War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Officer, 1891-1895), plate 11.

This set the stage for Grant to take his forces from Cairo, along with part of the newly-completed flotilla of ironclad gunboats led by their new commander Flag Officer Foote in order to attack Fort Henry, which the Union leaders accurately identified as the weak point in the Confederate defenses. On 1 February 1862, Halleck finally gave them permission to move forward with operations against Fort Henry. The next day the expedition from Cairo began, and Grant moved 17,000 men with steamers up the Tennessee River along with the newly arrived ironclad gunboats *Carondelet*, *St. Louis*, *Cincinnati*, the timberclads *Tyler*, *Conestoga*, and *Lexington*, and the *Essex* as flagship.

Fort Henry was commanded by Confederate Brigadier General Lloyd Tighlman, a West Point graduate who served only a few months in the Army before transitioning to a civilian engineering career prior to the war's start.⁵² The Fort was on a bluff next to the Tennessee River, eleven miles across a small swampy patch of land from Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River. The riverside armament of the fort included eleven heavy cannon of various calibers: eight smooth bore 32-pounders, two smooth bore 42-pounders, and one rifled 128-pounder Columbiad. The post was not in a bad location to control a near bend in the Tennessee, but it was on low ground, susceptible to flooding if the river were high. He was unable, and did not have the resources, to move the location of Henry when he took command in November of 1861. Tighlman did what he could with his men and resources to fortify and arm Henry, and to construct what was named Fort Heiman, across the Tennessee from Fort Henry and in a commanding position of

⁵² Edwin Cole Bearss and Howard Pervear Nash, "Fort Henry," in *Battle Chronicles of the Civil War: 1862*, ed. James M. McPherson (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 17-18.

elevation over Henry and the river. The problem for the Confederates was that Heiman was not finished by the early spring of 1862, and the small garrison was evacuated to Fort Henry before the Union advance. The other main issue for the Confederates during the spring of 1862 was that the river was unseasonably high. The result of the high water was a lack of effective cover in the parapet against naval artillery.

As Grant and Foote proceeded up the Tennessee towards Henry, Tighlman was removing nearly the entire 2800 man garrison. He realized that as conditions deteriorated that Fort Henry was becoming untenable.⁵³ The only route out of Henry was a single road that led across the swampy expanse of land between the rivers that led to Fort Donelson. Tighlman left less than one hundred soldiers at the fort in order to operate the guns on the redoubt to cover the movement of the main body.⁵⁴ The joint plan of action for the Federals against Henry was for the gunboat flotilla to engage the waterside batteries and pound the fort while the Army reached the landside of the fort to attack at the same time. Unfortunately for the Army, the wet weather, and associated mud in and around the swamps on the route to Henry delayed Grant and his divisions by four hours.⁵⁵

The naval action consisted of a division composed of the ironclads *Essex*, *St. Louis*, *Carondelet*, and *Cincinnati* in line abreast across the river, with the second division consisting of timberclads *Conestoga*, *Lexington*, and *Tyler* a half-mile behind

⁵³ Jesse Taylor, "The Defense of Fort Henry," In *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (New York: Castle Books, 1886), 369-371.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁵⁵ Grant, 149-150.

them. The action began around noon on 6 February, when the first gunboat division came within 1700 yards of the fort and opened fire. For the next ninety minutes the two gunboat divisions exchanged salvos with the fort until the latter surrendered to Flag Officer Foote.⁵⁶ The first division of gunboats utilized their three forward batteries, along with the three timberclad's single forward guns. This gave the Union flotilla fifteen total guns to bring against the eleven Confederate, of which only nine were in use for want of ammunition for the two 42-pounders.⁵⁷ The Federals disabled four of the 32-pounders and the Columbiad malfunctioned during the action. The Confederates suffered twenty-one casualties out of ninety-one soldiers in the fort, with seventy being captured upon the surrendering of the fort.⁵⁸ The three timberclads had gone without casualties through the action due to their distance from the fort. The *St. Louis* and *Carondelet* were hit multiple times, but sustained no casualties. The *Carondelet* reported being hit by eight Confederate shots, doing only cosmetic damage to the ship. The *Cincinnati* was Foote's flagship for the operation, and garnered extra attention from the Confederate gunners. The *Cincinnati* was hit thirty-one times, and had one killed and eight wounded. Twenty minutes before the fort struck her colors, *Essex* was hit by a shot that pierced her hull and hit one of her boilers. The explosion was catastrophic, scalding to death nine crewmembers and wounding nineteen more.⁵⁹ The *Essex* dropped out of the action

⁵⁶ U.S. War Department, *ONR*, vol. 22, 539.

⁵⁷ Taylor, 371.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ U.S. War Department, *ONR*, vol. 22, 539-540.

shortly after her explosion, but the day was nearly over. Tighlman surrendered his remaining seventy soldiers to Foote, but the rest of his original 2800 soldiers had escaped to Fort Donelson. The fort and prisoners had been taken without the participation of the Union Army at all.

While the tactical action of the battle was relatively short-lived, taking Fort Henry was one of the first strategic victories for the North on a national level. It opened the Tennessee River for further offensive operations, allowing the timberclads to push into Northern Alabama at Mussel Shoals, and into eastern Tennessee. It also displayed for the first time on a larger scale than Belmont, the combat capability of the flotilla. While the flotilla operated with seven ships instead of the eleven completed at that point due to manning issues, the force at Henry had superior combat power with respect to the naval guns at Fort Henry.⁶⁰ The number and quality of the naval guns and gunners were superior to their Confederate opponents in this case. The circumstances of the Fort Henry naval action were the best-case scenario for the flotilla's first major action together. The downside to this decisive victory was that it gave Union Army leaders an inflated view of what the Navy could accomplish, and was not representative of the flotilla's capability under more difficult circumstances against a better sited and constructed river fortification.

Fort Donelson

Grant and Foote had to organize their forces after the fall of Fort Henry and move against Fort Donelson. Between 7 and 13 February, Grant garrisoned Fort Henry, moved

⁶⁰ U.S. War Department, *ONR*, vol. 22, 534-535.

his 15,000 soldiers within two miles of Fort Donelson, and acquired a division of reinforcements of from Major General Don Carlos Buell, now commanding the Department of the Ohio.⁶¹ Foote reorganized the available gunboats to support after bringing two ships back to Cairo for repairs.⁶² Grant had hoped to overpower Fort Donelson with the gunboats while investing the fort on the landward side, ending the operation without a bloody fight. On the night of 13 February, Foote was in position below Fort Donelson with the ironclads *Carondelet*, *Louisville*, *Pittsburgh*, and his then flag ship *St. Louis*. He also had the timberclads *Tyler* and *Conestoga*. The attack began on 14 February, with the naval bombardment of the water batteries on the river. The action began at 3:00 p.m., and was over by 4:30 p.m.⁶³

Unfortunately for the Union Navy, Fort Donelson was not Fort Henry. Fort Donelson was in a commanding location along a seventy-five-foot high embankment. Foote attacked with the ironclads in the first row abreast of each other with the two timberclads abreast a thousand yards astern of the ironclads. This formation was then advanced up the river against the fort. Foote advanced the formation to the point where the ironclads were 200-350 yards from the shore.⁶⁴ The water batteries consisted of twelve guns of varying size and caliber that were in two batteries, twenty-five and seventy-five feet above the river respectively. The lower battery had nine smooth-bore

⁶¹ Grant, 152-153.

⁶² U.S. War Department, *ONR*, vol. 22, 539.

⁶³ Walke, *Naval Scenes*, 76-78.

⁶⁴ U.S. War Department, *ONR*, vol. 22, 585.

32-pounders and a rifled 10-inch Columbiad. The upper battery had two smooth-bore 32-pounders and another rifled 10-inch Columbiad.⁶⁵ Even with nearly forty years in the Navy, Foote and his subordinate commanders had almost no operational time with the ironclads, had only a general understanding of their capabilities and limitations, and had no standard techniques, tactics, and procedures for the use of multiple ships together.

The gunboats were unable to decisively defeat or subdue Fort Donelson's guns, and took the worst of the exchange. All of the ironclads would eventually have to use the current of the Cumberland to float away from the action and retire due to damage from Fort Donelson's guns. The guns from the gunboats had done damage to the battery, but had only disabled three guns and the defenders had incurred only two casualties from the shelling.⁶⁶ The gunboats on the other hand had incurred eight dead and forty-seven wounded during the action. *Carondelet* was on the firing line the longest during the day, and had been hit sixty times. One of the most significant casualties was to Flag Officer Foote, who took a large splinter to a foot.⁶⁷ The action that day had brought to light one of the design shortfalls of the City-class gunboats. The lack of armor on the horizontal surfaces of the ships made them susceptible to plunging shots from a high elevation. This was in addition to the forward batteries of the gunboats having limited elevation.

The lack of experience with the ships and the starkly different geographic setting of Fort Donelson was the basis for the miscalculation Foote made with his advancing the

⁶⁵ Reuben Ross, "River Batteries at Fort Donelson," *Confederate Veteran* IV (January 1898): 393.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 393-395.

⁶⁷ U.S. War Department, *ONR*, vol. 22, 586.

ironclads so close to the fort. This miscalculation determined the outcome of the action. The four ironclads had a combined seventy-six casualties. Two had their steering gear destroyed rendering them unable to navigate and four of the combined twelve forward guns of the four ships were destroyed or disabled.⁶⁸

Grant had witnessed the naval bombardment and concluded that he would not be able to influence the outcome of the battle with the gunboats.⁶⁹ Grant and his subordinates prepared for an investment of the fort as they encamped the night of the 14 February. In command within Fort Donelson was Brigadier General John Floyd, with Brigadier General Gideon Pillow as the second senior general. Both were political generals, not professionally trained, or well thought of by either side. The night of the 14 February, the Confederate leadership, under the impression they were outnumbered by 20,000 troops decided to attempt to fight a delaying action at daybreak of 15 February to allow for the remainder of the fort to evacuate south. Pillow led the assault the next day, surprised the Union forces, but the Federals regrouped midday, and retook all the terrain the Confederate forces had taken throughout the morning. A despondent Floyd had not evacuated any forces throughout the day, and he and Pillow took their staffs and some of the Confederate forces and fled in the night, leaving the more capable but junior Brigadier General Simon Bolivar Buckner to deal with the aftermath. Buckner

⁶⁸ U.S. War Department, *ONR*, vol. 22, 586-588.

⁶⁹ Grant, 155.

surrendered the next day after Grant's famous demand for nothing short of unconditional surrender by the garrison.⁷⁰

The impact of the taking of Forts Henry and Donelson was far reaching. Union forces now had access south via the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, with no major fortification left on either. The strong position that the Confederates had built at Columbus had now been outflanked on land to the east by the Union victories. Confederate lines in Kentucky were destroyed as the Confederate forces moved south from Bowling Green as the forces at Fort Donelson screened their movement south. The victories also spurred on Buell to move against western Tennessee and take Nashville. The Confederate leadership became acutely aware of growing public pressure due to the losses to oppose the Union forces pushing into the heart of the south. The Union also had reasons for concern. Flag Officer Foote continued to nurse the physical and emotional injuries of Fort Donelson. The early flotilla also had limited resources of ships because they now had an ever-expanding collection of river lines of operations to support and cover.

Shiloh

The end of February 1862 marked the beginning of two concurrent operations under Halleck in the Department of Missouri. The first was the continuation of the operations down the Tennessee and Cumberland by the forces commanded by Grant. The other began with the creation of the Army of the Missouri that Halleck charged with

⁷⁰ Lew Wallace, "The Capture of Fort Donelson," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (New York: Castle Books, 1886), 422-428.

clearing Confederate forces in vicinity of the river moving south from Cairo. Grant spent late February and March consolidating his forces, reconnoitering the areas in vicinity of the southern expanses of the rivers, and disrupting Confederate lines of communications.⁷¹ Foote had taken the ironclads from Donelson to Mound City for repair and refit, and the timberclads *Tyler* and *Lexington* stayed with Grant's forces along the Tennessee.⁷²

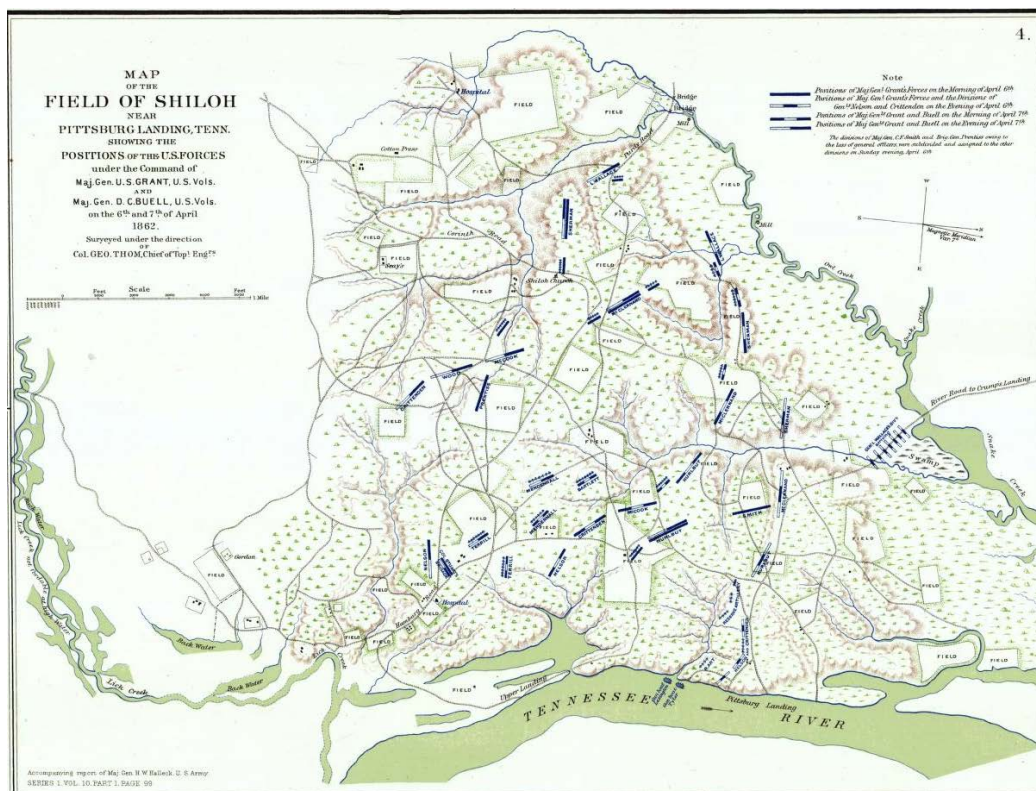


Figure 6. The Battle of Shiloh

Source: U.S. War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Officer, 1891-1895), plate 11.

⁷¹ Grant, 163-166.

⁷² U.S. War Department, *ONR*, vol. 22, 643.

Confederate Department Number Two Commander Albert Sydney Johnston was under substantial pressure after the losses at Fort's Henry and Donelson, Mill Springs, and at Pea Ridge, Arkansas, in early March. These defeats, along with the Federal push into the south forced Johnston's hand and he concentrated the forces he could gather from throughout his department and met Grant's forces in early April at Pittsburgh Landing, Tennessee, on the Tennessee River.⁷³

The engagement also goes by the name of a small church a few miles inland that saw much of the fighting, Shiloh. The two bloodiest days of the war up to that point were 6 and 7 April, and Union forces were near defeat at the end of the first day before Grant's army of 27,000 was reinforced by 20,000 soldiers from Buell's Army of the Ohio. On 7 April, the Union forces took the offensive as the Confederates had done the day before. The Confederates lost Johnston to a mortal wound during the morning and the day ended with the Union driving off the Confederates. Both sides suffered dead and wounded of nearly 10,000 each.⁷⁴

The small naval contingent was unable to play a comparable role at Shiloh as it had done with the earlier river battles. The two timberclads present at Shiloh represented themselves well, making a lasting impression on the Union leaders and the Confederate soldiers within reach of their guns.⁷⁵ *Tyler* and *Lexington* initially covered portions of the

⁷³ Beauregard, 570-574.

⁷⁴ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 167-169, 337-340.

⁷⁵ Thomas Jordan, "Notes of a Confederate Staff-Officer at Shiloh," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (New York: Castle Books, 1886), 602-604.

Union Forces along the Tennessee River on 6 April. The *Tyler* and later the *Lexington* silenced several Confederate batteries that had been emplaced on the southern side of Pittsburgh Landing near the Tennessee in the afternoon. The two ships also covered the Army as it retreated that evening towards the Tennessee, with both sides attributing the survival of a majority of the Federal forces to the steady bombardment of the two gunboats until the halting of fighting that night.⁷⁶ During the night, the two timberclads worked in concert with the Army and kept up a constant artillery barrage once the land-based artillery had quieted. The high water level at the time on the Tennessee allowed the gunboats to exploit the terrain along with spotting from the Army. The two gunboats spread hundreds of shells over a nearly six-mile radius area that the Confederates were encamped at throughout the night.⁷⁷ While certainly not a deciding factor of the action at Shiloh, the naval coordination and bombardment had a positive effect at critical times in the battle.

Shiloh is not discussed here in the same light as the previous three battles, but it is relevant because it was the most important engagement going on at that time in the west. It attracted the top Army leaders from both sides for the bloodiest battle of the war up to that point. This main attraction in the west forced new leaders and personalities to interact with the bulk of the naval force that had built a strong relationship with those fighting at Shiloh. Shiloh also put pressure on the resources of the Confederacy, especially the river fortification that were under the command of Major General Leonidas

⁷⁶ U.S. War Department, *ONR*, vol. 22, 766-768; Beauregard, 590.

⁷⁷ Joiner, 52-53.

Polk at Columbus. The resource and regimental shortages at the operational level would be a continuous theme for the Confederate leaders at New Madrid and Island Number Ten.

Along with these operational limitations, the tactical experience and lessons from the first year of the war would carry over to the operations at New Madrid and Island Number Ten. The experience and lessons learned at Fort Donelson would negatively affect Foote and the Navy, while some of his subordinates would be emboldened by their experience in those early battles.

The Confederate defensive strategy for a defensive line from the Mississippi to Bowling Green, Kentucky, had come apart. From Shiloh on, the Confederates would have a force in Northern Mississippi or Alabama attempting to outmaneuver or defeat the Union Army in the area. The Confederates would also have a separate strategy to continue to defend the Mississippi. The first year operations on the Mississippi, Tennessee, and Cumberland Rivers affected the Confederate execution of their river fortification strategy. The loss at Fort's Henry and Donelson would allow the Union Army to outflank the river fortification at Columbus, Kentucky from the east. Later Shiloh would enable the same at Fort Pillow. These vulnerabilities highlight the weakness in the Confederate application of their river fortification strategy and set the stage for their collection of squandered opportunities at New Madrid and Island Number Ten.

CHAPTER 3

THE ARMY OF THE MISSISSIPPI AGAINST THE JOINT CONFEDERATE FORCES AT NEW MADRID

Island Number Ten is so named because it was the tenth island in the Mississippi River south of where the Ohio River flows into the Mississippi. The island was located at the point in the Mississippi River between the corner of southeast Missouri and the border of Kentucky and Tennessee. This location is forty miles south of Cairo, Illinois, and fifty miles north of Memphis, Tennessee. There is little remarkable about this area other than its unique environmental elements and its geographic significance for the Union and Confederacy in 1861 and 1862. The first Confederate regiment that arrived on Island Number Ten to serve there at the end of 1861 described it as composed of 350 acres, several miles long, and positioned near the middle of the river. It had channels on either side of the island of one mile and three quarters of a mile respectively.⁷⁸

The size and orientation of the island was not nearly as important as its proximity to a significant s-turn in the Mississippi River. The Mississippi flows south to Island Number Ten, and then abruptly turns nearly 180 degrees to flow north for almost ten miles until it reaches New Madrid. The river again turns nearly 180 degrees again and heads back to its natural southern sojourn. The shape of the Mississippi is only one of the formidable aspects of this location. The entire area near the river in the vicinity of the island and New Madrid were wrought with swamps and bayous. Some areas that were

⁷⁸ James T. Poe, *The Raving Foe: A Civil War Diary and List of Prisoners* (Eastland, TX: Longhorn Press, 1967), 17.

below sea level were prone to flooding, with areas on both sides of the river impassible if the river level was high. The Mississippi was high for most of the spring of 1862, as the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers had been. The impact of the flooding was most acute in two locations. The first was on the north and west side of the river from New Madrid north. This swampy region created a nearly impassable peninsula between the right bank of the Mississippi for ten miles above Island Number Ten all the way to New Madrid. More importantly, a shallow lake named Reelfoot Lake dominated the area south of Island Number Ten and east of the Mississippi after the completion of its s-turn. Reelfoot Lake also acted as an oxbow lake when the river was high, creating a peninsula to its west. This meant that if someone was on the peninsula of land on the eastern side of the river known as Madrid Bend, they had to travel south by land into Tennessee, cross the river west to Missouri, or travel by small flat bottom boat across Reelfoot Lake and the swamps to the east to leave.

The impact of the geographic characteristics of the area was twofold. First, this position was difficult to outflank from the east as Columbus had been. It was nearly impossible for a large force to attack over that terrain from the east. The other side of that coin was it made maneuvering and resupply of the area between New Madrid and Island Number Ten dependent on the lines to the south and the river. It was a naturally strong position for defense if you could hold New Madrid and had Island Number Ten to defend the river from a northern incursion.

One of the only other points of note for the town of New Madrid outside of the Civil War exploits was that it is the location of the calculated epicenter of the largest collection of earthquakes recorded in the continental United States. Three main

earthquakes and five smaller aftershocks took place during December 1811 and January 1812. At the time, the town of New Madrid had the largest population between St. Louis and New Orleans along the Mississippi. The earthquakes destroyed the town. The local population would observe afterwards physical phenomenon such as the ground rising and falling to create a waterfall along the Mississippi.⁷⁹ Fifty years later, when the Confederates came to the area, the local inhabitants told stories of how the great earthquakes created unique terrain features. They stated that Island Number Ten and Reelfoot Lake did not exist at all prior to the earthquakes, and that the swampy area surrounding everything was due to massive acreages that were ten feet lower after the quakes.⁸⁰

Confederate Occupation of New Madrid and Island Number Ten

Confederate forces first occupied New Madrid in July 1861 when Brigadier General Gideon Pillow marched two Tennessee infantry regiments into the town. The pro-southern population greeted them with cheers when they arrived.⁸¹ The Confederates intended the movement to be part of a larger offensive thrust into southern Missouri but it never made it past New Madrid.⁸² In his correspondence with the then Department

⁷⁹ Arch C. Johnston and Eugene S. Schweig, "The Enigma of the New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811-1812," *Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences* 24 (1996): 339-384.

⁸⁰ Poe, 18.

⁸¹ J. G. Law, "Diary of Rev. J. G. Law," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 10 (January 1882): 566-568.

⁸² Charles Davis, "New Madrid and Island No. 10," in *Military Essays and Recollections: Papers Read Before the Illinois Commander of the Military Order of the*

Number Two Commander, Major General Leonidas Polk, Pillow seemed paralyzed by reports of Union forces at various points throughout southeast Missouri. Pillow repeatedly reported to Polk that if he only had one or two more regiments he would rid southern Missouri of Federal forces and push into Saint Louis.⁸³

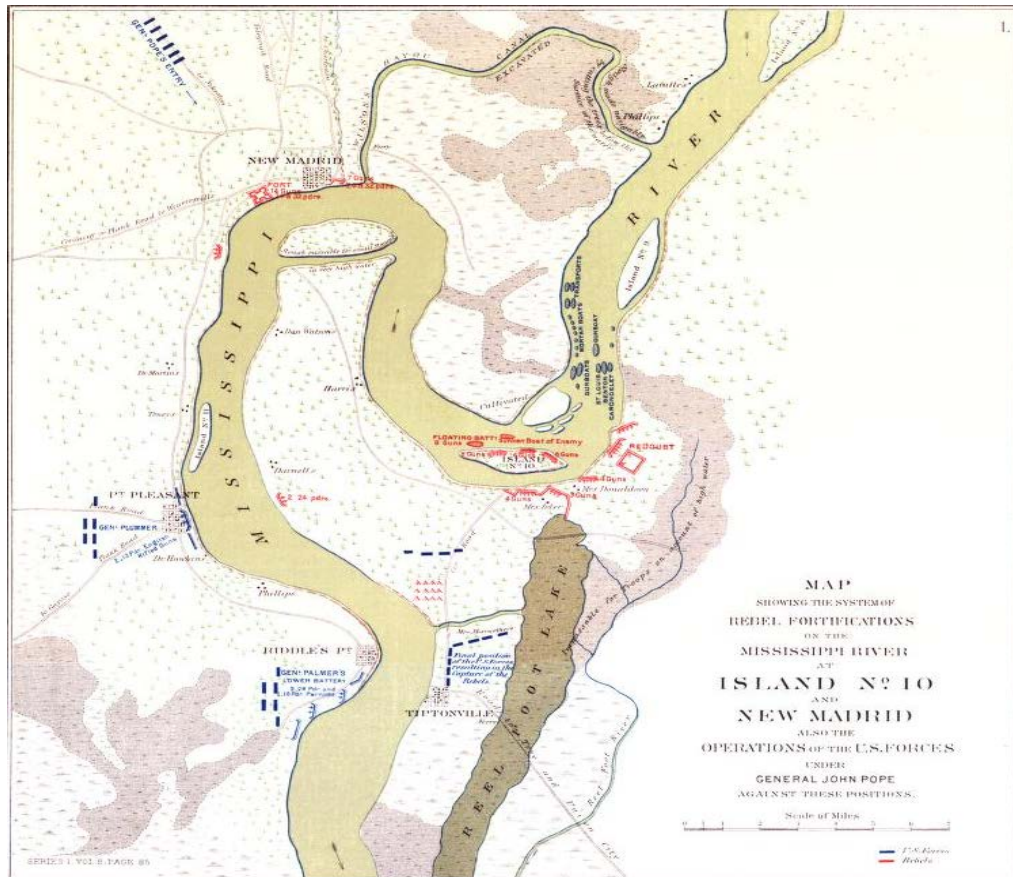


Figure 7. New Madrid and Island Number Ten Area of Operations

Source: U.S. War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Officer, 1891-1895), plate 10.

Loyal Legion of the United States, vol. 1, ed. Charles David (Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1891), 76-77.

⁸³ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 3, 626-630.

Polk was at the time incapable of reinforcing Pillow even if he wanted to do so. The western portion of the Confederate Department Number Two consisted of multiple independent commands that Polk struggled to coordinate in any way. At this early stage of the war, there were commands from the Missouri State Guard under General Jeff Thompson and General Sterling Price, Confederate forces in Arkansas under Brigadier General William J. Hardee and another between Arkansas and Missouri under Brigadier General Ben McCulloch. Added to this disorganized mess Polk also had Confederate leaders in the Indian territories south and west of Arkansas and Kansas attempting to convince the Choctaw Nation and other Native American tribes to join the Confederacy.⁸⁴ Polk struggled to maintain the Confederacy's thin line of defense within his department with his forces spread increasingly thin.

With Pillow's offensive cut short, it took another month of deliberating with Polk to decide the best use of his small force of 2,000 troops. Polk moved most of Pillow's troops south to the fortification that would take that commander's name, Fort Pillow, just north of Memphis, Tennessee. At the same time, Polk saw the need to fortify the area around Island Number Ten and New Madrid. He tasked his Engineering Officer, Captain Asa Gray to proceed to Island Number Ten. Several colonels in charge of regiments or brigades would technically be in command of the area for the remainder of 1861, but Captain Gray would be the point of continuity through the beginning of building of fortifications in early September 1861 until the spring of 1862. From September 1861 until the end of 1861, Gray relied on slave labor supplied by surrounding farms, and

⁸⁴ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 3, 620-632.

slaves sent from Memphis to accomplish the necessary fortifications. The work progressed slowly, as Gray reported on 18 September 1861.⁸⁵ He had only ninety slaves working on the gun emplacements on the island and the Tennessee left bank of the river north of the Island.⁸⁶ Major General Polk reported having only four officers and forty soldiers at Island Number Ten during October 1861. Throughout Gray's reports of 1861, the theme of a state of short supply and under appreciation permeates his correspondence.⁸⁷ This state of limited resources persisted until December 1861, as the first supporting regiments began to arrive at Madrid Bend.⁸⁸ As these regiments arrived, they worked with Gray to solidify the fortifications along the river and at New Madrid.

The Eleventh Arkansas Infantry Regiment was the first regiment to report to Island Number Ten on 22 November.⁸⁹ The Twelfth Arkansas Infantry Regiment arrived at New Madrid on 6 December.⁹⁰ The Eleventh Arkansas in theory was there to provide presence and aid Captain Gray in the development of the river defenses at and around Island Number Ten. The reality was that the regiment had been in existence for only a few months and had no guns or tools, and nothing resembling combat experience. The only thing that the regiment accomplished over the next month was a consistent regimen

⁸⁵ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 3, 702-705.

⁸⁶ Proceeding south down the Mississippi, the left bank is the eastern bank on the Kentucky or Tennessee side and the right bank is the western bank on the Missouri side.

⁸⁷ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 3, 720.

⁸⁸ Poe, 15-16.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁰ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 3, 704.

of drill.⁹¹ The Twelfth Arkansas, commanded by Colonel Edward Gantt, found themselves in charge of fortifying New Madrid against a Union attack from the north. Gantt equipped his regiment with arms out of his own pocket. The regiment's only combat action was the Battle of Belmont the previous month. After arriving at New Madrid, the regiment began to create two fortifications, Fort Thompson and Fort Bankhead.⁹²

Missouri State Guard Brigadier General Jeff Thompson was the namesake of Fort Thompson at New Madrid. He had maintained his headquarters in New Madrid throughout the end of 1861 into the beginning of 1862. The exiled Confederate state government created the Missouri State Guard as a militia organization. Prior to the Island Number Ten campaign, the main Missouri State Guard force operated under Major General Sterling Price in the southwest corner of Missouri, Arkansas, and later Mississippi. Thompson had his own district in southeast Missouri that remained autonomous with a much smaller force than the one Price commanded. Brigadier General Thompson and his forces did not report directly to a Confederate chain of command, but did coordinate with local and departmental leadership. Late in 1861, Thompson's force was a benefit to Gantt and his regiment, as the roughly 600-man force under Thompson resembled a cavalry battalion, scouting southeast Missouri and keeping the Confederate forces informed about Union movement. Thompson's force was not a well-disciplined

⁹¹ Poe, 16-17.

⁹² Randy Finley, "This Dreadful Whirlpool of Civil War," in *Southern Elite and Social Change: Essays in Honor of Willard B. Gatewood, Jr.*, ed. Thomas DeBlack and Randy Finley (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 61-63.

force. The troopers had value in their reconnaissance operations in the area, but Gantt could not rely upon them to take part in preparing any sort of defense for New Madrid. The other factor that prevented the long-term effectiveness of Thompson was the fact that most of his troops' enlistments were up at the end of 1861. The initial fervor of the start of the war had brought the Missouri State Guard substantial enlistees in southeast Missouri. The beginning of 1862 brought few reenlistments, and Thompson's force dwindled to between 100-150 troops. Any benefit that the Missouri State Guard had brought to the Confederate leaders at New Madrid diminished almost completely by the spring of 1862.⁹³

Between 1 January 1862 and 1 March 1862, the forces and infrastructure at New Madrid and Island Number Ten were slowly increased. Throughout February, reports began coming in to Gantt and Thompson from scouts and spies between New Madrid and St. Louis that a large Federal force was beginning to move south with the intention of securing New Madrid. It was not until these ominous reports, along with the concerns of Gantt that Major General Polk began to start to support the small garrison in earnest. Fort Pillow eventually furnished materials and additional regiments for the work. Polk also sent a newly promoted Brigadier General, John Porter McCown. McCown was a West Point graduate of the class of 1840. During the Mexican War, McCown was brevetted for heroism at the Battle of Cerro Gordo. He had resigned his Captain's commission in the Regular Army at the outbreak of the Civil War.⁹⁴ McCown had been one of Pillow's

⁹³ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 3, 704-718.

⁹⁴ Ezra Warner, *Generals in Gray: Lives of Confederate Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), 199.

regimental commanders when the small Confederate force that Pillow led had originally occupied New Madrid in July of 1861, prior to McCown's promotion.

McCown did not arrive at New Madrid until 26 February 1862, and had to organize the troops that haphazardly arrived over the previous month. Under McCown's command by the third of March there were eleven infantry regiments, two infantry battalions, five cavalry companies, six artillery companies, and the Tennessee Heavy Artillery Corps composed of seven artillery companies. The Confederate Navy also had a small squadron of seven wooden hulled gunboats in the area commanded by Commodore George Hollins. Providing fire support for the Army and security for the Confederate transports, the gunboats would work hand-in-hand with the Army to defend New Madrid. McCown task organized his forces into four brigades, independent of the Artillery Corps. One brigade would be comprised of the two original Arkansas infantry regiments, the Eleventh and Twelfth, a Missouri cavalry company, and two independent artillery companies, all under the command of Colonel Gantt and stationed at Fort Thompson. The second brigade would be composed of three infantry regiments: the Fifth Tennessee, the Fifty-Fifth Tennessee, and the Fourth Arkansas. Bankhead's Battery also joined this regiment, becoming the namesake of the fortification they garrisoned. Fort Bankhead was east of New Madrid on the edge of impassible swamps, with Colonel Lucius Walker commanding the brigade. These two brigades were under the command of Brigadier General Alexander Stewart, who reported on 2 March and was responsible for the forces at New Madrid and reported to McCown.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 125-127.

McCown eventually created two more brigades, the first composed of three infantry regiments, the Twelfth Louisiana, Fourth Tennessee, and the Thirty-First Tennessee, under the command of Colonel Rufus Neely of the Fourth Tennessee. The other brigade was composed of the Eleventh Louisiana Infantry Regiment and the Fifth Louisiana Infantry Battalion under Colonel Samuel Marks of the Eleventh Louisiana. Outside of this organization, there were three additional infantry regiments, four cavalry companies, and three artillery companies. These two brigades and the additional forces spread out between Tiptonville, Madrid Bend, and Island Number Ten. They were tasked with the direct support to the many batteries on the island and along the river controlled by the Tennessee Heavy Artillery Corp under the command of Brigadier General Trudeau of the Artillery Corps.⁹⁶

These forces eventually had a substantial amount of fixed and mobile guns, from the two New Madrid forts, and from nine different batteries between Island Number Ten and the eastern banks of the Mississippi. Fort Thompson, on the southern edge of New Madrid had fourteen field guns, all smooth bore 32 and 24-pound guns. Fort Bankhead, on the eastern border of New Madrid and the swampy bayou had six smooth bore 32-pound guns.⁹⁷ The five shore batteries had twenty-four guns, of which seven were rifled. The four island batteries had twenty-three guns, of which six were rifled. Additionally, the Confederate Navy had supplied a floating battery, the *CSS New Orleans*, which was previously at the Pelican Dry-dock at Algiers, Louisiana. The massive barge was able to

⁹⁶ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 126-130.

⁹⁷ John Pope, *The Military Memoirs of General John Pope* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 48-49.

ballast down to have only iron plating visible above the water. The battery had fourteen guns and was located on the northwest side of the island.⁹⁸ This collection of works and guns was in place by the middle of March, with fifty-six heavy guns guarding the northern approach of the Mississippi River.⁹⁹

On paper, the Confederate force in early March had nearly 7500 soldiers, sixty-two guns, and the support of seven wood-hulled gunboats.¹⁰⁰ The Confederates had occupied the area for over seven months and should have been capable of developing defensive fortifications that rivaled the well-documented defenses at locations like Vicksburg or Petersburg. There was no high ground to speak of, but there were plenty of natural features to exploit with the river, swamps, and lake. Major General Polk, and then Department Deputy Commander General Pierre T. G. Beauregard, expressed to McCown upon his arrival at New Madrid that it was imperative to hold New Madrid at all costs.¹⁰¹ No general except for Pillow early on and then McCown had personally visited the New Madrid area, even with Columbus only fifteen miles away. Captain Gray and Colonel Gantt repeatedly requested advice and a personal visit to validate their direction and work.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Silverstone, 230.

⁹⁹ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 138-146.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 754-760.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 709.

What comes across in the Confederate correspondence between December and February are several themes. The first is the sheer amount of correspondence that Polk received and was responsible for in his command. He had very few large forces or large area commanders that reported to him. Instead, he supervised numerous smaller commanders that reported to him from all over the west, including Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, and Indian Territory. He interacted directly with Gantt and Captain Gray, but also Jeff Thompson, Governor Claiborne, and Sterling Price, with a collection of other leaders at the colonel and below level. All of this correspondence communicated an ineffective command structure that in itself limited the entire organization's ability to progress in any task quickly.

The inexperience of the leaders in place at Island Number Ten and New Madrid compounded the communications issues. One engineer and two inexperienced regiments with little equipment were unable to make the necessary progress until the influx of men and materials in February. In addition, any correspondence from New Madrid or the island before March communicated an under-manned and ill-supplied state of affairs. Gantt, who had no previous military experience before election as colonel, displayed a generally desperate tone throughout his early correspondence. He was always in need of more men and equipment, and thought the Union forces could overrun his position at any time. Polk did report to President Jefferson Davis in early January that he needed 10,000 men at New Madrid, though there were never other measures taken to make that assessment a reality. There was also a fixation throughout this early time that a key for the Confederates forces building the necessary fortifications was their ability to have access to slave labor. There are several examples of leaders stating that if they only had

more slave labor, they could achieve the necessary defensive fortifications. These requests give the impression that some of the leadership at New Madrid focused more on not having what they thought was the requisite amount of slave labor rather than performing whatever they had to with the force at their disposal. There would be fluctuating levels of slave labor employed, mostly around the island. These numbers varied between 100 and 500 depending on the agricultural requirements of the surrounding areas.

McCown was an Army regular prior to the war, but one who never held an independent command. In his twenty years as an artillery officer, he never came close to being responsible for such a large and dispersed force as had been hastily assembled at New Madrid and Island Number Ten. He had only been a general officer for a few months and failed to develop a staff that he trusted to aid him in collecting and disseminating information. This was an incredibly challenging set of circumstances for a first time commander to walk into. He had inconsistently armed and trained regiments, no operational command experience, and only a short time to organize and empower his troops.

The Army of Mississippi and New Madrid

As early as 20 January 1862, Major General Henry W. Halleck began describing his strategy to push south from the Missouri border east to the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. Part of this strategy was an eventual push down the Mississippi that included taking New Madrid when he had the forces available.¹⁰³ It was not until a month

¹⁰³ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 508.

later, after Grant's operations against Fort Henry and Fort Donelson in Tennessee, along with Brigadier General Samuel Curtis' progress in Northern Arkansas, that Halleck identified Brigadier General John Pope as the commander of a new army.¹⁰⁴ Pope, who had commanded the Districts of Northern and then Central Missouri for the first year of the war, met with Halleck in St. Louis on 18 February to discuss the prospects of opening the Mississippi to Memphis via New Madrid and Island Number Ten, along with the creation of the Army of the Mississippi.¹⁰⁵

Pope hailed from an affluent Kentucky and later Illinois family. He was a distant descendent of George Washington, and more importantly for his military career was his relation by marriage to Mary Todd Lincoln. He was an 1842 West Point graduate, was brevetted twice during the Mexican War, and served in the Topographical Engineers Corps of the Army until the Civil War. He became a Brigadier General of Illinois Volunteers at the outbreak of the war.¹⁰⁶ General John C. Fremont assigned him to command of the District of Northern Missouri in July of 1861. Fremont had not even reached St. Louis at the time of Pope's appointment, leaving Pope in charge of all the area in Missouri north of St. Louis by himself. Pope was responsible for securing the two railroads in northern Missouri and in countering the small Confederate-leaning gangs that were commonplace across the state. This left Pope and his forces spread out, operating along the lines of the twenty-first century paradigm of stability operations. He had very

¹⁰⁴ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 562-564.

¹⁰⁵ Pope, 47.

¹⁰⁶ Ezra J. Warner, *General in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1964), 376.

little actual combat until 18 December, when forces under his command decisively won the small battle of The Blackwater River, taking 1300 prisoners. Even in this action, Pope was not in the field, but had one of his colonels executing his tactical orders.¹⁰⁷ This victory along with Pope's administrative and organizational effectiveness, his West Point education and previous Regular Army experience were enough to endear him to his new boss, Henry Halleck. This relationship and Pope's performance over the previous eight months made him Halleck's best candidate to command the Army of the Mississippi.

Pope's first task was to proceed to Cairo, Illinois, and assess the threat to that location. If there was none, he was to take an initial small force to Commerce, Missouri, to begin to receive forces and organize the Army of the Mississippi for a push south. Pope quickly reported to Halleck that Cairo was in no danger, and proceeded with two companies of infantry to set up camp at Commerce on 21 February.¹⁰⁸ With the Confederate threat to the Border States diminished greatly by the early spring victories of Grant and Curtis, Halleck mobilized regiments from all over his department to send to Pope. Within a week, Halleck sent eleven infantry regiments, one cavalry regiment, and engineers and artillery from St. Louis, Cairo, and Louisville to be the backbone of Pope's new army. This initial force would number nearly 10,000, and would be hastily task organized into two divisions, each with two brigades. Brigadier Generals Schuyler Hamilton and John Palmer headed the two initial divisions.¹⁰⁹ Hamilton was a West

¹⁰⁷ Wallace J Schutz and Walter N. Trenerry, *Abandoned by Lincoln* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 64-72.

¹⁰⁸ Pope, 47.

¹⁰⁹ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 572.

Pointer and Mexican War veteran, while Palmer was a lawyer and politician who would be the only non-West Point general that commanded a division for Pope.¹¹⁰ Pope chose colonels in command of the various regiments to command the newly formed brigades. By 28 February, the first elements of Pope's Army were moving south towards New Madrid. They marched through wet and muddy early spring conditions through the southeastern Missouri hamlets of Benton and Sikeston on their way to the northern edge of New Madrid. Jeff Thompson's Missouri State Guard cavalry monitored the Federal movement, and attempted to harass Pope's force as it moved south of Sikeston, fifteen miles north of New Madrid. Unfortunately, for Thompson, his small force of 200 troopers was no match for the Union cavalry on 2 March. The small Confederate element quickly dispersed, with seven captured and three small field artillery pieces taken by the Federals.¹¹¹ The vanguard of the Army of the Mississippi reached the outskirts of New Madrid on 3 March. That same day, three more infantry regiments also reached the force, enabling the creation of a third division, under Brigadier General David Stanley.¹¹² Stanley was an 1852 West Point graduate who had served on the frontier with the cavalry and participated at Wilson's Creek the previous year.¹¹³ This brought the Union totals to

¹¹⁰ Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 200, 358.

¹¹¹ George E. Ranney, "Reminiscences of an Army Surgeon," in *War Papers Read Before the Michigan Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, vol. 2, ed. Chase Hampton (Detroit, MI: James H. Stone and Company, 1898), 177-178.

¹¹² U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 589-590.

¹¹³ Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 470.

three divisions, organized into six brigades composed of thirteen infantry regiments, two cavalry regiments, an engineer regiment, and six artillery batteries.

Though the fighting and investment of New Madrid began promptly with the arrival of the initial force, Halleck continued to send reinforcements to Pope until the end of the month. By the end of March, Pope had an Army with an effective strength of 22,808 soldiers. Pope task organized these troops into five divisions; the two new divisions under the command of Brigadier Generals Eleazer Paine and Joseph Plummer, respectively. Both were West Point graduates with limited operational experience during their prior time in the Army.¹¹⁴ These five divisions were composed of ten brigades, twenty-one infantry regiments, five cavalry regiments, one engineering regiment, and eleven artillery batteries.¹¹⁵

Numerically, this force was superior to anything that the Confederacy could bring against the Union outside of the forces forming to oppose Grant and Buell at Shiloh. The Union Leaders within the Army of the Mississippi were as experienced or more so than their Confederate counterparts. The regimental commander and above level within Pope's organization was heavily laden with West Pointers and Regular Army experience. Outside of the division commanders, three of the brigade commanders eventually became Major Generals of Volunteers: James Slack, James Morgan, and Nathaniel Buford. Colonel Gordon Granger, commanding Pope's cavalry, would go on to have the most illustrious Civil War record of the entire group, serving heroically at Chickamauga,

¹¹⁴ Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 356, 374.

¹¹⁵ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 94-95.

Chattanooga and numerous other engagements. Before the conclusion of the war, he attained the rank of Major General of the Regular Army.¹¹⁶

The Union soldiers within the regiments were inexperienced, though at least armed and equipped in a superior manner than their southern counterparts. New Madrid would be the first time most of the soldiers of the Army of the Mississippi saw combat. Never being on the receiving end of enemy artillery, soldiers from the Twenty-Seventh Ohio thought that they would be able to jump over solid shot that was rolling and ricocheting towards them. This ended disastrously for members of the Twenty-Seventh, as two soldiers that tested this hypothesis each lost a leg attempting as much on 6 March.¹¹⁷ A soldier from the Eleventh Missouri Infantry Regiment reported that soldiers were having lunch amidst the rolling and bursting shells on 4 March, evidently not knowing any better.¹¹⁸ This was the nature of the conflict all over the country over the first year of the war. Large amounts of naive young soldiers thrown together under a broad spectrum of leaders expected to kill each other for their respective causes. The reality that emerged after the drilling, marching, and digging was an incoherent, murky experience where soldiers and leaders tried to figure out how to survive and what to do next every step along the way. The circumstances were no different on 3 March 1862,

¹¹⁶ Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 181.

¹¹⁷ Oliver W. Nixon, "Reminiscences of the First Year of the War in Missouri," in *Military Essays and Recollections: Papers Read Before the Illinois Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, vol. 3, ed. Roswell Mason (Chicago, IL: The Dial Press, 1899), 430.

¹¹⁸ Harvey L. Carter and Norma L. Peterson, eds., "William S. Stewart Letters," *Missouri Historical Review* 61, no. 4 (July 1967): 464.

when the forces of the Army of the Mississippi began to attempt to enforce their will upon McCown's forces in their fortifications along the Mississippi River.

The first elements of the Army of the Mississippi arrived on the outskirts of New Madrid early on 3 March. The 1000 inhabitants of the town had largely left, leaving the town and surrounding area empty with the exception of the opposing military forces. The Confederate forces greeted the encroaching Union forces with shot and shell from Forts Thompson and Bankhead upon their approaching within two miles. Thompson's Cavalry was not very useful against their Federal counterparts in combat, but proved effective at reconnaissance; the Union forces failed to surprise the Confederates in any way.¹¹⁹ Over the course of 3-7 March, Pope and his subordinate commanders spread out around the perimeter of New Madrid, dug in, and began to probe the Confederate defenses. The factor that attributed most to the Federal forces' inability to overrun the Confederate defenses in the first few days was not the forts, artillery, or the Confederate infantry, but the small Confederate Navy squadron then guarding New Madrid.

Confederate Commodore George Hollins joined the U.S. Navy in 1814 at the age of 15, participating in the final two years of the War of 1812. He served in the U.S. Navy for nearly forty-seven years before he resigned at the outbreak of the Civil War. He was one of the most senior officers to resign from the Union ranks. He was first in charge of defenses along the Virginia rivers, and then moved late in 1861 to the defense of the Mississippi River. At the start of 1862, he was commodore of a small squadron of

¹¹⁹ David Prentice Jackson, ed, *The Colonel's Diary; Journals kept before and during the Civil War by the late Colonel Oscar L. Jackson...Sometime Commander of the 63rd Regiment O. V. I* (Sharon, PA: Jackson, 1910), 45.

converted riverboat ferries and steamers.¹²⁰ Commodore in this case was not a rank, but a designation of his role in charge of a squadron of multiple ships. The squadron itself consisted of seven ships of varying size and armament. The smallest ship, the *Jackson*, had two rifled 32-pound guns. The largest was the *McCrae*, a converted Mexican Navy vessel, with eight guns including one rifled 6-pound gun. The other five ships had between three and seven guns of a wide spectrum of sizes and calibers. All seven ships were wooden, without upgraded exteriors for defense against enemy guns.¹²¹ This small fleet had a collection of heavy guns that made them very effective in supporting ground forces against the lighter, mobile artillery of Army artillery batteries. Their main drawback was that their lack of reinforced super structure made them vulnerable to the attack of a similarly armed, ironclad gunboat that could trade blows with them.

¹²⁰ George N. Hollins, "Autobiography of Commodore George Nicholas Hollins," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 34 (1939): 228-238.

¹²¹ Silverstone, 229-230, 244-245.



Figure 8. CSS *McCrae*

Source: Naval Heritage and History Command, “CSS McCrae (1861-1862),” U.S. Navy, accessed 17 April 2016, <http://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-46000/NH-46483.html>, image NH 46483.

Hollins’ biggest asset in aiding the defense of New Madrid was the height of the Mississippi River in March of 1862. Much like the Tennessee and Cumberland the previous month, the Mississippi was near flood stage when the Army of the Mississippi began its attack on the Confederate fortifications. This high level of the river, combined with the flat terrain at New Madrid that receded into the surrounding swamps, gave the gunboats the ability to anchor off the two fortifications and pour heavy shot and shell at nearly a flat angle into the oncoming troops and their emplacements.¹²² The ability of the

¹²² U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 81.

Confederate squadron to support the defense of the two forts at high water was a key early advantage for McCown and Hollins.

As the Army of the Mississippi invested New Madrid, it also absorbed and reorganized the reinforcements that continued to join the force. The divisions then dug in to create a line of battle between two and three miles from the main works of the two forts. There was a line of Confederate entrenchments between the two forts, through the city, that paralleled the river. The forces exchanged artillery fire and the Union forces probed the Confederate defenses. The common sentiments throughout the accounts of these first few days of fighting were that the superior force of the Federals would have taken the works had it not been for the support of the gunboats. Soldiers from the Sixty-Third Ohio and Eleventh Missouri recalled the prevailing sentiment in the ranks that they would have taken the town and fortifications, but would not have been able to maintain the gains under the fire of the Confederate gunboats.¹²³

As Pope and his subordinate leaders came to the realization that the taking of New Madrid would come at a steep price of human life, Pope attempted to devise a plan to address the Confederate advantages and put pressure on McCown and his leaders. Two or more of the Federal Navy ironclads under Foote could overcome the advantages of the Confederate squadron and the Confederate forts, but they were still weeks from being on station to aid Pope and his force. This led Pope to the first step of his plan, to request heavier siege guns from Cairo and Major General Halleck. These heavier guns were

¹²³ Jackson, 45; Carter and Peterson, 464.

analogous to the armament on Hollins' gunboats. They would give the Federals a chance to knock the smaller artillery and the gunboats out of action during prolonged shelling.¹²⁴

On 9 March, Pope sent Colonel J.W. Bissell, the Commander of Pope's Engineer Regiment of the West, back to Cairo to supervise the laborious transit of siege guns from that location to New Madrid. Bissell, along with Captain Joseph Mower, U.S. Infantry, and two companies of infantry made the trek pulling the large guns through the mud at points by hand. They arrived back in New Madrid on 12 March with much effort expended.¹²⁵

While Pope waited for his heavy artillery to arrive, he enacted the second part of his plan, mitigating the Confederate river advantage by sending a force south to a point along the Mississippi to create a lodgment with infantry and artillery in order to inhibit Confederate movement on the Mississippi. The initial hope was that the artillery at the lodgment would cut off the transport and gunboat traffic as they transited from New Madrid down to Fort Pillow and vice versa. If successful, Pope thought he might be able to take the Confederate gunboats out of the defensive equation for New Madrid. The location chosen for this lodgment was Point Pleasant, Missouri. Point Pleasant sits on the west bank of the Mississippi twelve miles south of New Madrid at a point that juts out into the river, giving an advantageous location for an artillery battery. The other benefit of Point Pleasant was that the Federal forces had learned that the exiled Confederate

¹²⁴ Pope, 49.

¹²⁵ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 596, 599.

Missouri state government was then convening in Point Pleasant, giving the Union forces a target of opportunity outside of the New Madrid Campaign.¹²⁶

On 4 March, Pope sent Colonel Plummer of the Eleventh Missouri with three infantry regiments, three companies of cavalry, and an artillery battery to establish a lodgment at Point Pleasant. It was a total force of 3000, and they reached Point Pleasant the night of 5 March after dragging their equipment and supplies through nearly impassably muddy, swampy roads.¹²⁷ Plummer's force had heavy skirmishing at Point Pleasant with a small Confederate force there. The reports of the action listed one dead and four wounded on the Union side, with twenty-five dead on the Confederate side.¹²⁸ By the end of 6 March, Plummer had dug out a lodgment along the river at Point Pleasant for his four-gun battery from the First Missouri Light Artillery. They also established rifle pits for sharpshooters, with the supporting regiments rotating through the rifle pits in the support of the guns. The effect of this lodgment was that the Union forces could disrupt and deter transports heading north or south in vicinity of their location.¹²⁹ They were unable to stop the gunboat movement, but they exchanged artillery and sharpshooter fire with the Confederate gunboats daily.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Nixon, 428.

¹²⁷ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 81.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 593.

¹²⁹ George W. Driggs, *Opening of the Mississippi; or Two Years' Campaigning in the Southwest* (Madison, WI: William J. Park and Company, 1864), 15.

¹³⁰ Carter and Peterson, 465.

The geography that Plummer had chosen and the defensive fortifications that his men had designed proved to make this an effective position during the entire period of operations. Even with the daily encounters with the Confederate gunboats, the Federal forces experienced few casualties. A private from the Seventh Illinois Cavalry recounted that the forces supporting Point Pleasant suffered more deaths, two, during a tornado that landed near their camp than they incurred from the Confederates.¹³¹ While not meeting Pope and Plummer's goal of completely cutting off the Confederate transports and gunboats, the forces at Point Pleasant were effective at disrupting the river transports and forcing the Confederates to react to the threat of the Union battery. Plummer later sent one of his regiments and the Forty-Seventh Indiana to create another lodgment and battery at Riddle's Point, across from Tiptonville, Tennessee, where the Union continued to put pressure on the Confederate transports and gunboats that attempted to resupply the Confederate forces.¹³²

Pope's forces now located at Point Pleasant, kept up heavy skirmishing with the Confederate defenders, and made several demonstrations on their works to maintain pressure on the perimeter of the Confederate defense. Once Colonel Bissell returned to New Madrid on the evening of 12 March, his sappers and miners began work to create gun emplacements for the heavy siege guns that were only 800 yards from the

¹³¹ Henry Harrison Eby, *Observations of an Illinois Boy in Battle, Camp and Prisons-1861 to 1865* (Mendota, IL: Eby, 1910), 39.

¹³² Austin Crabbs, *Civil War Letters: The Mississippi River Campaigns 1861-1864* (Denver, CO: Rippey, 1982), 12.

Confederate lines.¹³³ These operations were in concert with the Tenth and Sixteenth Illinois regiments, who dug trenches to support the gun emplacements and enabled the Union soldiers a base for slowly advancing the system of earthworks over time.¹³⁴ While the Union had accomplished little tangibly over their first ten days at New Madrid, Pope appeared proactive and in control of his large organization. His manpower was divided and used effectively to attack several tasks that take a great deal of labor. He put his soldiers in position to be successful once he had all the necessary tools.

Confederate Evacuation of New Madrid

Before daylight on 13 March, the siege guns of the Army of the Mississippi opened up on Forts Thompson and Bankhead. Until the sun set on 13 March the two forces exchanged shot and shell. The Union guns addressing Fort Thompson sent a thousand shots into the fort and the surrounding gunboats that day. The Confederate gunners mirrored the Union pace, equating to the highest day of casualties throughout the entire six weeks of operations. One of the four Union siege guns took a direct shot from a Confederate gun, disabling the gun, killing three soldiers around it and wounding five more.¹³⁵ Pope's forces also used the heavy artillery barrage to continue to push Confederate pickets in at points along their perimeter, and expand their trenches to continue to gain advantages on the defenders.¹³⁶ On 13 March, the day ended with the

¹³³ Nixon, 429.

¹³⁴ Pope, 50.

¹³⁵ Jackson, 47-48.

¹³⁶ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 82, 99.

cessation of artillery firing, and without a clear change in the state of either force. The fire and fighting was intense, and the Federals continued to inch closer to the Confederate works. If continued the following days, this advance by the Union would eventually bring about Pope's desired effect of having his forces and heavy artillery close enough to the forts to overwhelm them with his superior numbers while having the artillery close enough to protect his forces from the gunboats.

As the Army of the Mississippi sat through severe thunderstorms on the night of 13 March, they woke up on 14 March expecting to continue with their barrage and advance on the Confederate works. What Pope and all his subordinates at New Madrid realized on the morning of 14 March was that the Confederates had used the previous night's thunderstorm to mask withdrawing their entire force from New Madrid. When the Federals investigated that morning, they found the scene of a very hasty withdrawal. The Confederates had only taken the soldiers; all equipment, stores, and ammunition they abandoned to the Federals. The Army of the Mississippi found unburied dead, ammunition, and magazines left open and all over the area, thirty-three pieces of artillery hastily spiked, three hundred horses, and tents and provisions for nearly 10,000 soldiers.¹³⁷ Officers left their baggage; food was still on tables, and candles still burning in tents: they had taken nothing with them but the men.¹³⁸

Between 3 March and the evacuation of the Confederate forces at New Madrid on the night of 13 March, Brigadier General McCown had continuous communication via

¹³⁷ Pope, 51.

¹³⁸ Jackson, 50.

letter and telegraph with Major General Polk and eventually with General Beauregard. This correspondence illuminated few details about what the garrisoned forces at New Madrid did in detail day-to-day, but communicated McCown's sense of impending doom for his first command as a general officer. McCown's reports written weeks after the action go through a sequence of skirmishing, Union demonstrations, artillery exchanges, and the lodgment at Point Pleasant generally in line with what Pope's forces reported.¹³⁹ McCown's correspondence during the action itself focused on ensuring that his superiors understood the difficult position that his small, overworked force had been enduring. McCown identified the numerical deficiency his forces faced, stating the enemy's numbers anywhere from 20,000-40,000 depending on the report. The Confederates were fighting hard, but the overwhelming force could frontally attack his small works at any time and capture nearly half of his total force. There was the constant threat, though it would not materialize for several weeks, of the Federal gunboats running Island Number Ten to destroy the Confederate gunboats and cut off the New Madrid Force. The return and parallel correspondence from Polk and Beauregard during the first two weeks of March focused on reassuring McCown of what defense his forces and geographic advantages should be capable of performing. Polk and Beauregard also discussed between themselves attempting to reinforce McCown with regiments, ammunition, and slave labor to stiffen his defense.

Things began to unravel for McCown after the report of the evacuation of New Madrid reached Confederate leadership. There is no record of correspondence between

¹³⁹ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 127.

McCown and any subordinates during the investment of New Madrid during the first two weeks of March. Beauregard launched an investigation about the evacuation, eliciting reports from the brigade commanders and above. McCown and Brigadier General Stewart attempted to justify the actions of their men during the evacuation. McCown eventually stated in subsequent reports that he ordered the evacuation because the Confederate gunboats could not survive the heavy siege guns of the Federals, the Federal forces were attempting to cut the line of communications between the two forts, and that to hold New Madrid would “cause a constant loss of life.”¹⁴⁰ The three officers involved gave their accounts differing substantially in perspective and detail. This divergence in perspective is reflective of the state of McCown’s command and the confused manner of the evacuation.

Brigadier General Stewart’s account of the evacuation was by far the most detailed and thorough about the background to 13 March, the discussions and planning for the evacuation, and the execution. This investigation of the evacuation was an indicator of the perception of the incident as a possibly failure of command at a time when Confederate operations in the western part of the war were not proceeding well. This fact could not have escaped Stewart and the others, and their responses are in that context. Stewart painted an effective picture of the crisis that his New Madrid force was weathering. He also began his report stating that he had been willing to stay and defend New Madrid as long as ordered, making it clear it had not been his decision to evacuate. He accounted for the process, why his forces could not take any of their artillery pieces

¹⁴⁰ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 127, 785.

with them in the weather, and the transportation shortcomings. The report read as an experienced officer justifying his and his subordinates' performance when he understood the negative perception after the fact. Stewart's two juniors, the newly minted Brigadiers Gantt and Walker's respective reports give off none of the shrewdness that Stewart portrays with his detailed account that mitigates the negative aspects that he tries to make clear he did not control.¹⁴¹

Gantt and Walker submitted reports of how they executed the orders they were given to the best of their ability, and how the process was performed effectively from their perspective.¹⁴² They are at best inexperienced accounts of officers that were not fully aware of what was going on with the forces under their purview. At worst, the accounts are fabrications written with the intent not to incriminate their authors. It is impossible to judge looking back, though both Gantt and Walker had dubious records after this battle. Gantt swore allegiance to the Union and went on to be a Union representative and then Reconstruction leader in Arkansas after his capture and parole at Island Number Ten. Walker took part in a duel with Confederate General John Marmaduke after New Madrid. He was shot and killed in a dispute that occurred at the Battle of Helena, Arkansas, on 4 July 1863. He developed poor relationships with every superior he served with between the two events.¹⁴³ While those singular reports have no clear causal link to the later exploits of the respective generals, it seems that while

¹⁴¹ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 773.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 162-170.

¹⁴³ Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 322.

Stewart may have been capable, his two juniors were out of their depth at that early point in the war.

That is not to say that the justification for evacuation was unfounded. The gunboats were vulnerable to the heavy shot of the Union siege guns, and by 13 March the Confederates were outnumbered approximately 19,000 to 3,000 at New Madrid. Each side plainly overestimated the strength of the enemy to their superiors. Stewart probably made the most accurate assessment, identifying that his forces could not withstand the offensive like the Union put forward on 13 March for more than ten more days. They struggled to stop the advance of the enemy trenches, but the Union artillery continued to take its toll on the works and gunboats as they pressed into the breastworks of the two fortifications. Had the forces held out and resorted to the bayonet to defend direct assaults on the two works, casualties would have been high on both sides. It seems strange, or disingenuous, after the evacuation for McCown to identify casualties as a motivation for an evacuation when there had in fact been few casualties up to that point. The Confederates reported twenty casualties in those ten days of fighting prior to evacuation. The serious fighting did not start until 13 March, and resulted in only eight casualties that day.¹⁴⁴ Multiple times in late February and early March, Beauregard and Polk directed McCown that New Madrid should be held at all costs. While not explicitly directing that he ignore casualties and defend until the destruction of his force, the implication from his superiors' orders was that a bloody defense was expected. This was not part of McCown's calculus as he met with his subordinates late on 13 March.

¹⁴⁴ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 127.

The issues that McCown's superiors had with the evacuation appeared to be less about the impetus to evacuate the garrisoned forces than with the haphazard and disorganized manner that the evacuation was executed. McCown eluded in his second report to Polk about how unsure he was about the effective accomplishment of the evacuation. Stewart glossed over the shortcomings of the evacuation other than the artillery, which he addressed. The other two brigadier generals reported that everything went great and that they only left small amounts of gear and equipment. Union and Confederate accounts made it clear that personnel was the only thing not left at New Madrid. The reason for the poor performance during the night evacuation was not readily apparent. An account from one of the regiments at Fort Thompson described how most of the men in the regiment did not know they were evacuating until they got on the boats that night. The regiment marched off in lines thinking they were going to attack the enemy.¹⁴⁵ Large organizations often have challenges communicating to every level throughout the organization, but the leadership and communication disconnects on 13 March within the Rebel ranks at New Madrid are one root cause for the negligent manner that the equipment was left at the Confederate camps at Thompson and Bankhead.

The evacuation appears to have been premature, but the capitulation of New Madrid under the weight of Pope's forces was only a matter of time. The nature of the evacuation had a negative effect not only on the material readiness of McCown's forces but also on the morale of the soldiers that found themselves without tents and cooking

¹⁴⁵ Poe, 28.

utensils when they were displaced to Tiptonville or Madrid Bend.¹⁴⁶ The other impact of these proceedings was the erosion of confidence that Polk and Beauregard had in McCown. McCown's ambiguous and defeatist sentiments began to make his two superiors look for a replacement to attempt to rescue the situation now revolving around Island Number Ten. The evacuation of New Madrid marked the end of the first phase of the operations along the Mississippi at New Madrid and Island Number Ten. With Pope in command of New Madrid, the bulk of operations for the next phase fell upon the Navy component led by Flag Officer Foote and his Western Gunboat Flotilla against the Confederate forces and batteries at Island Number Ten.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 30-31.

CHAPTER 4
JOINT UNION FORCES AGAINST ISLAND NUMBER
TEN AND MADRID BEND

As Major General Pope and the Army of the Mississippi woke up to an evacuated New Madrid on 14 March, Flag Officer Foote and the Western Gunboat Flotilla were getting underway from Cairo in order to support Pope's force in taking Island Number Ten. Foote had taken the majority of his force back to Cairo after the engagement at Fort Donelson to refit and heal from the beating they took. Foote and his ships had returned to Cairo on 22 February 1862, and spent the next three weeks on repairs and awaiting the completion of mortar boats and the *Benton* that would complement the other ironclads on the push down the Mississippi.¹⁴⁷ Foote departed Cairo the morning of 14 March with six ironclads, the newly completed flagship *Benton*, *Carondelet*, *Pittsburgh*, *St. Louis*, *Cincinnati*, and the *Mound City*. He also had ten newly finished mortar boats. These small mortar boats had no method of propulsion and were towed wherever needed. They contained one large mortar, surrounded by a hexagon shaped casemate without a roof. These 13-inch mortars could throw a 227-pound solid shot 4600 yards at high angles. The gun design, originating from U.S. coastal fortifications before the war, was altered for the small riverboats.¹⁴⁸ Foote also had with him several transports that contained three regiments of infantry with 2000 soldiers, brigaded under Colonel Nathaniel Buford. In

¹⁴⁷ U.S. War Department, *ORN*, vol. 22, 619.

¹⁴⁸ Warren Ripley, *Artillery and Ammunition of the Civil War* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970), 67-68.

theory, the Flotilla Brigade's purpose was to ensure if the Navy was able to force Island Number Ten to capitulate like Fort Henry that they had adequate Army forces to occupy the island.¹⁴⁹

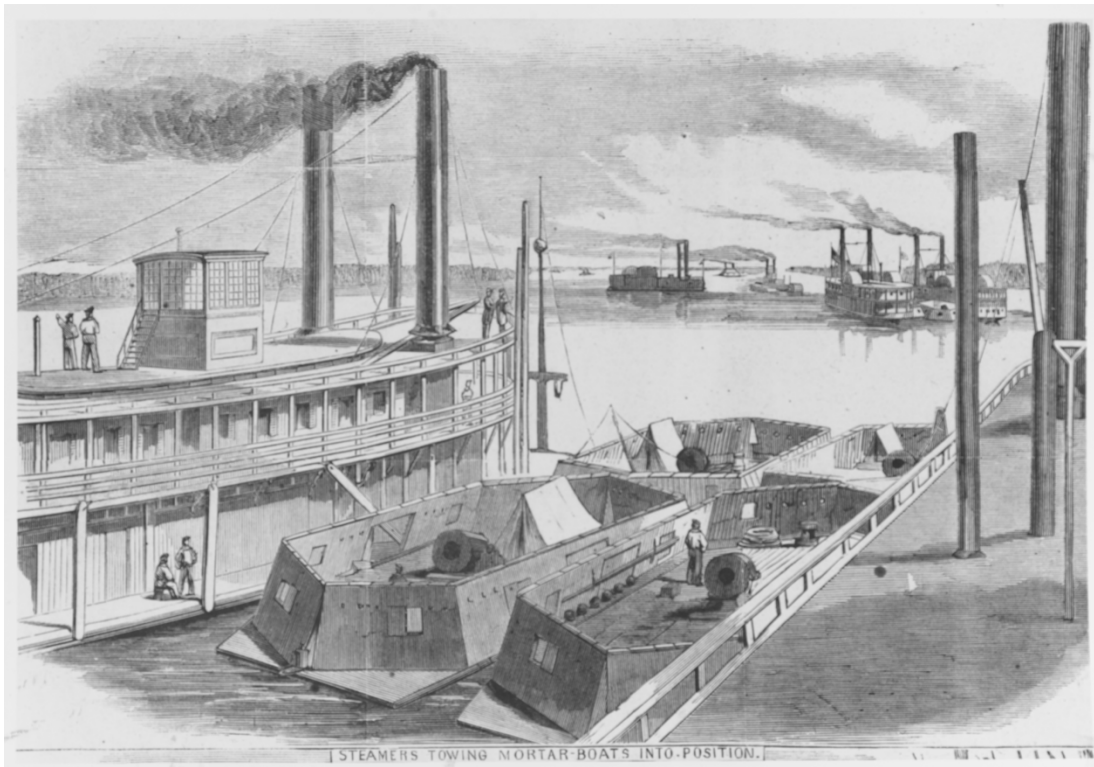


Figure 9. Union Mortar Boats

Source: Naval Heritage and History Command, “Island Number Ten Campaign, 1862,” U.S. Navy, accessed 17 April 2016, <http://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-58000/NH-58887.html>, image NH 58887.

Foote and his flotilla arrived north of Island Number Ten on the morning of 15 March. Hampered by weather and visibility, they were unable to engage the enemy

¹⁴⁹ U.S. War Department, *ORN*, vol. 22, 693.

batteries until the morning of 16 March. From 16-30 March, Foote and the Navy bombarded the various batteries of the Tennessee shore, Island Number Ten, and the Confederate floating battery daily. The heaviest action took place on 17 March. The *Benton*, *Cincinnati*, and *St. Louis*, attacked the Confederates' most northern battery, Rucker's Battery, while lashed together. The ships worked in coordination with the mortars during the attack.

The Union ships and the Confederate batteries exchanged fire throughout the day at relatively close range, though the long-term damage to the Confederate fortifications was minimal. The damage to the ironclads was also minimal, with the one exception being a gun on the *St. Louis* bursting, killing two sailors, and wounding thirteen others.¹⁵⁰ Commander Henry Walke later commented, "The guns the Western Gunboat Flotilla furnished at the start of the war were so poor and old that they were considerably more destructive to the ships than they were the enemy."¹⁵¹ After 17 March though, the intensity of the Union bombardment tapered off, mostly consisting of longer-range firing that had a limited long-term effect that was never capable of dislodging or destroying the Confederate batteries.

Foote has a different tone throughout this period than he showed over the previous months when he corresponded to his two superiors, Halleck in St. Louis and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles in Washington. Foote appeared reluctant to act

¹⁵⁰ U.S. War Department, *ORN*, vol. 22, 694.

¹⁵¹ Henry Walke, "The Western Flotilla at Fort Donelson, Island Number Ten, Fort Pillow and Memphis," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (Edison, NJ: Castle/Book Sales, 1990), 439.

decisively and was extremely risk averse at every turn. Some of the concerns he had were very real. Unlike at Fort's Henry and Donelson, the Mississippi River flows south from where the Union Navy was stationed north above the island. The implication of this is that if a gunboat were disabled or injured, it would float down towards the Confederates for either destruction or capture. With a small number of forces on the northern Mississippi and the other western rivers, losing any of the ironclads would be a crushing blow. Worse than an ironclad being destroyed would be the capture of one or more ironclads by the Confederates. Along with disabled ships floating down the river, the other concern was that the City-class were underpowered for their weight, and struggled greatly to operate against the current of the Mississippi, which was two to three knots faster than the Tennessee or Cumberland, a significant challenge for the underpowered gunboats. The gunboats also lacked armor plating on their quarters and the aft part of the ships. The maneuverability and armor limitations meant that the gunboats needed to attack a fortification head on for their armor plating to be effective against the return fire from that location. This put the ironclads in a position of having their heavier iron plating protect them from the Confederate batteries. This also led Foote to lash multiple ships together in order to stabilize them and use their engines in concert, as on 17 March.

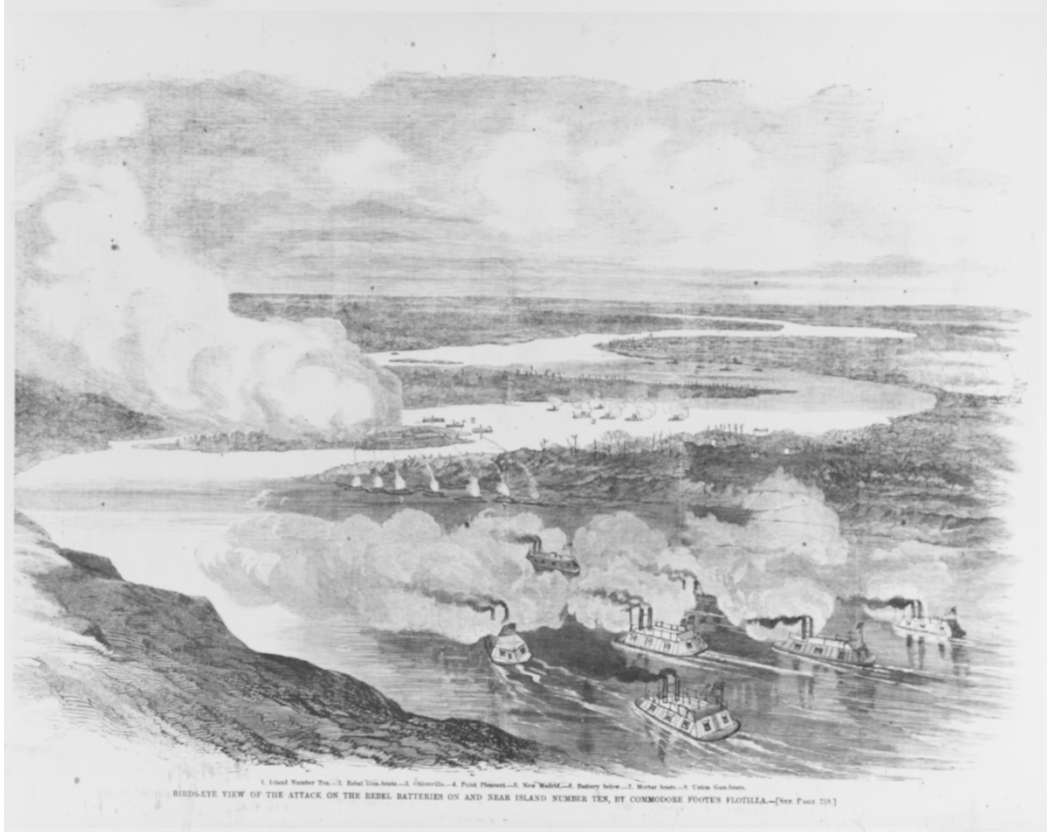


Figure 10. Naval Bombardment of Island Number Ten

Source: Naval Heritage and History Command, “Island Number Ten Campaign, 1862,” U.S. Navy, accessed 17 April 2016, <http://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-58000/NH-58888.html>, image NH 58888.

Along with the concern about the direction and current of the river, Foote appeared too concerned about risking his gunboats in any way. He communicated to Welles and others over the course of the first few weeks of March that his little gunboats were the only things protecting the north from a southern invasion. He painted a picture to his brother in Cleveland that he was the only thing keeping that city safe from

Confederate forces.¹⁵² His statement to his brother seems like an exaggeration, but he perceived his main goal during the operations in March to keep his entire force intact, regardless of the implications on supporting Pope. The concerns that Foote had about Confederate intentions for a river borne offensive were not groundless. One of the officers onboard CSS *McRae*, recalling the campaigning of several junior Confederate naval officers to press an attack on Cairo late in 1861 and early in 1862. While Hollins appeared not to have taken this idea seriously, the threat was not total fiction. It is impossible to know if Foote had any ideas about these Confederate deliberations, or if his fears were self-imposed.¹⁵³

The other aspect of Foote's attitude toward risk and casualties were the recent experiences of Fort Donelson. Foote had served bravely all over the world, and had justly built a reputation as a man of action. Fort Donelson was the first time that forces under his command had suffered significant casualties. Amplifying this fact was his personal role in the battle, where his injury was only a small part of the large amount of bloody carnage around him. Foote was a dedicated, pious, and stoic character. James Eads, the designer of the City-class ships was onboard *Benton* while the flotilla was north of Island Number Ten, talking to Foote about improvements to the ships. In the middle of their discussion, Foote received a telegram about the death of his 13-year-old son. Eads reported that Foote took fifteen minutes to himself in his cabin and then rejoined Eads,

¹⁵² John Foote, "Notes on the Life of Admiral Foote," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (Edison, NJ: Castle/Book Sales, 1990), 347.

¹⁵³ Charles William Read, "Reminiscences of the Confederate States Navy," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 1 (May 1876): 337.

showing no signs of the trauma. Foote may have been able to keep himself composed through this period, but Eads did notice the degraded health of the flag officer.¹⁵⁴ He was still nursing his injured foot from Fort Donelson; he would be on crutches through April. The combination of physical and emotional wounds from Donelson appear to deeply affected Foote as he grappled with the prospect of sending more of his ships into harm's way.

As early as 20 March Foote called a council of war with all of his ship captains to discuss the prospect of one of the ships bypassing the defenses on the shore and island by transiting down the Mississippi at night to support Pope at New Madrid. Foote reported that all but one of his captains agreed with him that running the batteries at night should not be undertaken.¹⁵⁵ Foote did not identify the dissenter for this meeting, and later accounts dispute whether it was Lieutenant Commander Seth Phelps, commanding the *Benton*, or Commander Henry Walke, commanding the *Carondelet*. Either way, Foote was not ready to allow any of his ships to undertake the attempt. Sailors onboard the *Mound City* were discouraged by this decision when it leaked out. Ensign Symmes Brown related in a letter to his fiancé that he and the crew of *Mound City* were quite confident that they could run the batteries if given the chance.¹⁵⁶ Regardless of the individual dissent, or the deck-plate sentiment, the action would not yet be undertaken.

¹⁵⁴ Eads, 345.

¹⁵⁵ U.S. War Department, *ORN*, vol. 22, 697.

¹⁵⁶ John D. Milligan, ed., *From the Fresh-Water Navy: 1861-1864; The Letters of Acting Master's Mate Henry R. Browne and Acting Ensign Symmes E. Browne* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1970), 49.

Cutting the Canal to New Madrid

Without a gunboat or transports at New Madrid, the operations were at an impasse. Pope had control of New Madrid and the Missouri side of the river down to Point Pleasant, but he had no means of moving his 20,000 or so soldiers across the river to attack the remaining Confederates that were operating and supporting the guns and fortifications at Madrid Bend and Island Number Ten. Even if one of the gunboats was able to run the gauntlet of the defending guns at night, Pope needed transports to move his soldiers. The transports were unlikely to pass through the Mississippi guns even if the gunboats could. This is the point where the inherent weakness of the command relationships between the Army and Navy became clearest. There was very little correspondence directly between Pope and Foote. It is not clear, if Pope did not want to engage Foote, or if he was operating in deference to the command structure that had been in place for the preceding six months. He confined the majority of his requests and feedback to Halleck for relay to Foote. Foote corresponded directly with Pope even less than Pope attempted to with Foote. While Halleck was in command of Pope and his Army, Halleck handled Foote carefully for the most part, with the only actual order given on 13 March to depart Cairo. Halleck supported Pope effectively with reinforcements and supplies throughout, but continually reinforced Foote's growing cautiousness. Added to this convoluted command structure, Assistant Secretary of War Thomas Scott arrived at New Madrid in late March to observe the operations. Scott also began to send Foote notes and telegrams that described the desired support that Pope needed.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ U.S. War Department, *ORN*, vol. 22, 709.

Whatever the command structure discussed by the Army and Navy Departments, Foote did not see himself working for the Army Department and Pope. It appeared the only chain of command that Foote was actually concerned about was Gideon Welles, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gus Fox, and the Navy Department. Neither Welles nor Fox gave Foote actual orders or tactical direction. Foote reacted through this entire operation as though he did not regard anyone else's requests or ideas as anything resembling a legal order. The picture painted 16-30 March is one of inactivity, caution, and disregard for the needs of the Army by Foote. Pope became increasingly frustrated through this period, reflected by Scott's reports to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. Pope sent his engineer, Colonel Bissell, to interact with Foote and the Navy on several occasions, to no avail. Bissell was on hand for the initial council of war on 20 March, and later described his disgust and frustration with what he perceived as near cowardice on the part of the Navy.¹⁵⁸ The individual dissent during the meeting did much to cause Bissell to minimize the concerns of the dangers of running the batteries. Even empowered by the lone disagreeing opinion, Bissell had no knowledge or experience with anything Navy or river, making it premature for him to pass judgment so quickly.

It is interesting that Pope chose to send a colonel to interact with Foote and the Navy. Pope had four brigadier generals at New Madrid that could have undertaken the face-to-face coordination. Instead of Pope going himself, a prospect that should not have been a stretch, or sending an emissary of Foote's rank to interact with the flag officer, he sent a colonel who was an engineer. Bissell proved himself an extremely competent and

¹⁵⁸ U.S. War Department, *ORN*, vol. 22, 734.

important officer through these operations who was not to blame for the strained relationship. Pope evidently did not appreciate, or possibly understand, the culture of a naval service, which through the antebellum period showed an unparalleled deference to rank and status. Naval officers like Foote had traveled independently to far off locations like Africa and China and interacted directly with foreign officers and dignitaries as an emissary for the United States. There was no guarantee that Brigadier General Hamilton or Stanley would have helped the situation at key times, but the relationship between Pope and Foote is striking in contrast to the close relationship between Grant and Foote only a month or two before. Grant and Pope's personalities were very different, and the circumstances of each operation influenced the personal relationships of the leaders. Foote may have not been of a mindset to have a productive relationship with any Army on scene commander or leader at that point. Whatever the root causes, the fault for its shortcomings did not rest on Pope or the Army solely; the relationship between the two organizations was dysfunctional from the beginning. The pressure on Foote and the Navy continued to build as he remained indifferent and defiant about any of his ships running the batteries.

To attempt to break this stalemate, Pope and his leaders began to look for alternate ways to solve their transportation problems. Bissell and his engineers, along with representing Pope to the flotilla, investigated the swampy region between New Madrid and the region of the Mississippi where the Navy was above Island Number Ten. The region consisted of a challenging combination of dense old growth forests, overgrown bayous, and swampy, inundated lowlands. Bissell and some of his engineers scouted this area with a local guide and identified the most direct, accessible route

between New Madrid and a point several miles above Island Number Ten. The route connected an old wagon road that started on the right bank of the Mississippi next to the levee at a point ten miles north of Island Number Ten, across from small Island Number Eight. This wagon road was in an open area that was flooded, but led to a heavily wooded two-mile stretch that connected to Wilson's Bayou. Wilson's Bayou in turn runs into St. John's Bayou, whose outlet was just east of Fort Bankhead at New Madrid. These bayous are small rivers with poorly defined shorelines surrounded by wet, low-lying areas.

Between 20 March and 2 April, Bissell and his 700-man Engineer Regiment of the West were completely engaged in the clearing and creation of a canal between the Mississippi River opposite Island Number Eight and New Madrid. These thirteen days consisted of using every hour of daylight and every available man to create a fifty-foot wide canal or channel that was at least four-feet deep. It was a herculean effort enabled by several novel processes developed by Bissell and his soldiers as they went. The engineers first had to clear a two-mile stretch of dense forest that had eight to ten feet of standing water on it. The group used a process of first cutting the trees eight feet above the water by men on platforms built on small rafts. Another group of men with snatch blocks and pulleys connecting to the steam capstans of three small steamers supporting the work hauled away the portion of the trees already cut off. To cut the remaining tree trunk below the water, the engineers had designed a crosscut saw that connected to the remaining tree trunk, controlled by four men on a raft that cut the tree four feet below the water. In this laborious and systematic manner, the engineers cleared two miles of submerged trees in eight days, 700 men working dawn until dusk. Once this task was complete, they still had to clear large amounts of debris and mud from the two bayous,

effectively dredging them, to enable the 50-foot wide canal. This entailed five more days of painful work. By 2 April though, the Union had a canal navigable by small steamers and transports from the upper Mississippi to New Madrid. The gunboats had too deep of a draft to allow for their transit through the bayous, and they would have to make their own way down.¹⁵⁹

The prospect of the completion of the Army's channel and continued pressure on Foote led him to have another council of war on 30 March. He asked in this venue if any of his captains wanted to volunteer for the dangerous task of running the batteries. At this point, he had a willing and eager volunteer in Henry Walke of the *Carondelet*. Foote acquiesced. On the same day, Foote issued orders for Walke to take *Carondelet* and, whenever practicable, transit from their current location to New Madrid at night. Walke intended to undertake the task after preparing his ship for the transit. He also preferred a night where the weather supplied a storm to help him mask his ship's transit. He would have to wait several days, but he would get his storm.

Spiking Rucker's Battery

As Walke prepared the *Carondelet* and Bissell completed the channel, one more event of note occurred on the night of 1 April. The Flotilla Brigade under Colonel Buford that supported Foote had little direct involvement through most of March with any of the action against Island Number Ten. With little to do in support of the operations, the Fifteenth Wisconsin and seven companies from the Twenty-Seventh Illinois moved

¹⁵⁹ Josiah W. Bissell, "Sawing out the Channel Above Island Number Ten," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (Edison, NJ: Castle/Book Sales, 1990), 460-463.

against a Confederate position at Union City, Tennessee, twenty miles east of Island Number Ten. The small Union force surprised an encamped Confederate force of roughly twice its size in an action consisting of artillery fire and skirmishing that lasted only one day.¹⁶⁰ This action had little or no impact on any operations at Island Number Ten, though the Confederate forces at Union City had been one of the forces attempting to resupply the Confederates between Tiptonville and Island Number Ten.

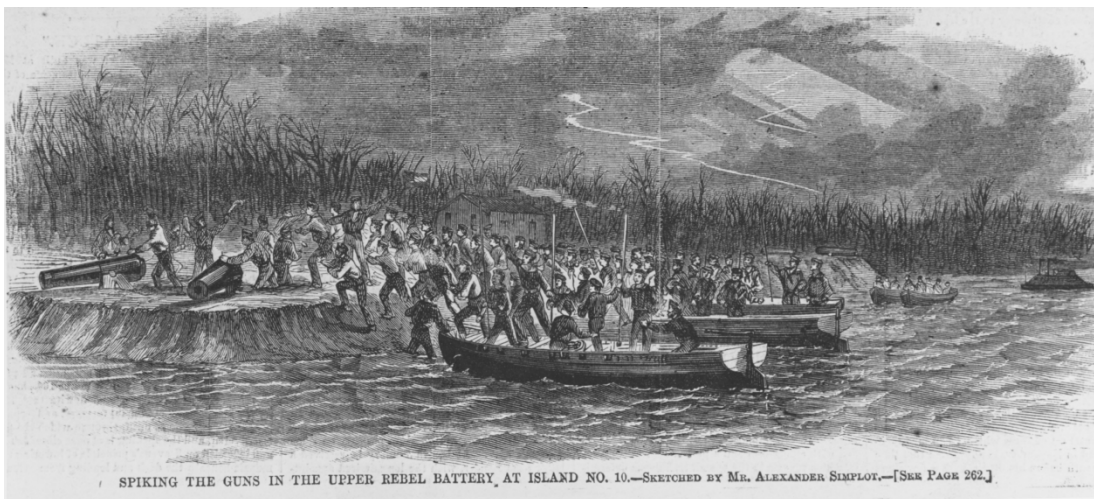


Figure 11. Spiking Rucker's Battery

Source: Naval Heritage and History Command, "Spiking Confederate Guns above Island Number Ten," U.S. Navy, accessed 17 April 2016, <http://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-59000/NH-59022.html>, image NH 59022.

¹⁶⁰ Carol Lynn Knight and Gerald S. Cowden, eds., "Two Immigrants for the Union: their Civil War," *Norwegian-American Studies* 28 (1979): 114; Per Hvamstad, ed., "The Letters of Mons H. Grinager: Pioneer Soldier," *Norwegian-American Studies* 24 (1970): 16.

Other than this action, the three flotilla regiments were engaged in monotonous picket and guard duty. Colonel George Roberts, commanding the Forty-Second Illinois Infantry Regiment, and Major Walworth of the same command attempted to devise a plan where the Forty-Second could have an impact on the operations and the expected running of the batteries by one of the gunboats. The plan they devised was to attempt a clandestine infiltration of Rucker's Battery at night to spike the six guns there. Spiking is a process that entails temporarily disabling a cannon by jamming a barbed spike or other object in the touchhole of a canon. This was common practice in the Civil War, generally by withdrawing forces that did not want artillery to fall into enemy hands. The spiking process depended on the thoroughness of the soldier undertaking it, which was not always consistent. The guns spiked at New Madrid by the evacuating Confederate forces were again operational within twenty-four hours. Roberts and his men had performed reconnaissance of the surrounding area and waterways during their sojourn with the Navy in the last two weeks of March. He brought his plan to Foote at the end of March, who approved of the initiative.¹⁶¹

His subordinates from the Forty-Second Illinois described Colonel Roberts as brave to the point of rashness, and that he never asked a man to go where he would not.¹⁶² Roberts would go on to command a brigade of regulars under Brigadier General Philip Sheridan at the Battle of Stone's River near Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Sheridan

¹⁶¹ E. S. Church, "The Spiking Party at Island No. 10," *The National Tribune*, 15 November 1883.

¹⁶² Thomas Fay, "Who Spiked the Guns at Island No. 10?" *The National Tribune*, 13 November 1890; L. R. Garver, "Col Geo. W. Roberts Spiked Them," *The National Tribune*, 18 February 1904.

described Roberts as a brave, dashing, and ideal soldier. Sheridan's division had held its ground against the Confederate attackers on the morning of 31 December 1862. Roberts would gallantly lead his brigade on the last day of 1862 until he died on the battlefield defending an area referred to as the "slaughter pen." His performance elicited his adversaries to document his bravery in their official reports after the day's fighting. Brigadier General Alexander Stewart, the same that commanded the Confederate troops at New Madrid, lauded Roberts' gallant death while rallying his troops opposite Stewart's line as the Confederates advanced for the fourth time that day.¹⁶³

On 1 April, Roberts had the forty largest, strongest men from Company A of his regiment selected to accompany him and four of his officers that night. The small expedition used five rowboats, one each from the ironclads of the flotilla. Each boat had ten sailors for the rowing and one of the *Benton's* officers to oversee the boats and sailors through the expedition. The boats and their near 100-person force left the flotilla at 11:00 p.m. with muffled oars, under what was described as "a night so dark you could scarcely see the glimmer of the water."¹⁶⁴ Roberts and his boats quietly approached Rucker's battery after the three-mile transit. The battery had only two sentries posted at night; the rest of the regiment assigned to operation and support of the battery slept a half-mile away due to the high water in the redoubt. Roberts stated in his official report that the sentries did not sight his boats until they approached to ten yards within the redoubt. Both sentries fired a wild shot at the Federals and then fled. The group of forty soldiers then

¹⁶³ Philip Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles L. Webster and Company, 1888), 210, 229.

¹⁶⁴ Church.

split in half, twenty taking positions to defend the spiking party against expected reinforcements, the other twenty to the task of disabling the guns. With one gun previously dismantled and under water, the other five then had metal files hammered into their touchholes. Confederate reinforcements did not reach the fortification in the short time Roberts and his soldiers did their work. The guns were spiked, and the group was back in their rowboats after less than a half hour.¹⁶⁵

While only six of the over fifty guns that defended the island and the Mississippi approach were now inoperable, neutralizing the northern most battery was a significant achievement. The next day, Foote moved his mortar boats and ironclads further south than he previously thought was prudent. This allowed for a concentrated fire on the Confederate floating battery. The floating battery had significant offensive capability, but unlike its shore counterparts, it could sink. After taking a substantial amount of punishment from the mortars on 2 April, the floating battery moved two miles down the river next to the Madrid Bend bank, farther from the Island.¹⁶⁶ Robert's soldiers did an effective enough job that the battery remained inoperable for the remainder of the action around Island Number Ten. This movement had the secondary effect of making the floating battery guns less effective in defense of the island and the fields of fire between the island batteries and the floating batteries now did not intersect in as dangerous a manner as they did before. The absence of Rucker's Battery and the reduced

¹⁶⁵ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 708.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 709.

effectiveness of the floating batteries played into the success or failure of Commander Walke and the *Carondelet*.

Carondelet Runs the Gauntlet

Henry Walke was born in Princess Anne County, Virginia, in 1808, but moved with his family to Chillicothe, Ohio, at the age of two. He was five years Flag Officer Foote's junior, appointed a midshipman in the Navy in 1827. He served in a similar fashion to his peers, serving on multiple ships in various locations all over the world for the first twenty years of his career. During the Mexican War, he was the Executive Officer of the gunboat *Vesuvius*. The *Vesuvius* was present at the capture of Vera Cruz, Tabasco, Turpan, and Alvarado. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Walke was in command of the stores ship *Supply*, responsible for resupplying the U.S. Navy ships stationed off the coast of Mexico attempting to support Mexico prior to the Franco-Mexican War that broke out in late 1861. In a bizarre episode, the *Supply* was in port at the Pensacola Navy Yard when Florida seceded from the Union in January 1861. The base commander surrendered to a force of local militia when they approached the base. Walke got underway after he saw the U.S. flag lowered at the base, but came back two days later under a flag of truce to pick up the paroled soldiers, sailors, marines, and their respective families. Walke picked up ninety-nine passengers, and proceeded to the New York Navy Yard to transfer the passengers.¹⁶⁷

Afterwards he was court-martialed for leaving his station without orders, and disobeying orders. His original orders were to return to Veracruz, Mexico, after leaving

¹⁶⁷ U.S. War Department, *ORN*, vol. 4, 62-64.

Pensacola. Walke had attempted on two occasions to communicate his circumstances and intentions to the then Secretary of the Navy Isaac Touchy, but the communications of the time and general confusion at the outbreak of the war left much lost in translation. Fortunately for Walke, the naval forces in vicinity of Veracruz at the outbreak of the war were not in need of resupply at the time, and the new Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles viewed his actions as common sense, which led to his acquittal.¹⁶⁸ After Walke was cleared of this incident, he took command of the first timberclad *Tyler* when it was complete in September 1861. He then took command of *Carondelet* once it was complete. He served with the Western Gunboat Flotilla until August of 1863, when he took command of the screw sloop *Sacramento*. *Sacramento* performed blockading duty and then hunted Confederate blockade-runners off the European coast until the end of the war.¹⁶⁹ He eventually retired from the Navy in 1873 as a rear admiral. Outside of his naval career Walke was a distinguished artist, well known for his naval paintings and lithographs.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ “Trial of Commander Walke,” *New York Times*, 27 February 1861.

¹⁶⁹ Silverstone, 44.

¹⁷⁰ Cogar, 200-201.

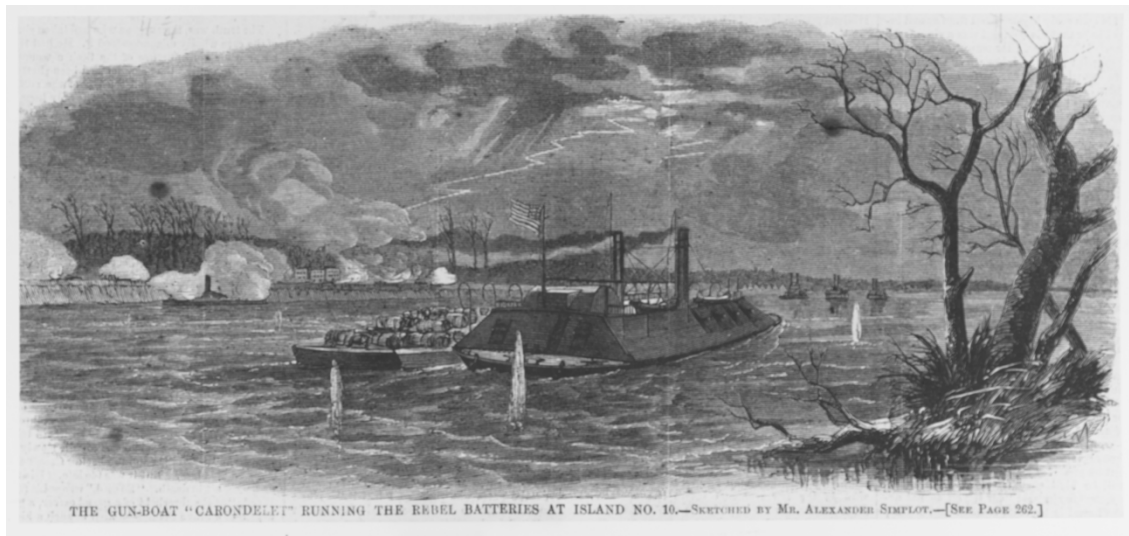


Figure 12. *Carondelet* Runs the Batteries at Island Number Ten

Source: Naval Heritage and History Command, “The Gun-boat ‘Carondelet’ Running the Rebel Batteries at Island No. 10,” U.S. Navy, accessed 17 April 2016, <http://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-58000/NH-58889.html>, image NH 59022.

Walke spent three days preparing for his perilous transit. He and his crew attempted to bolster the defensive shortcomings of the *Carondelet* in preparation for the expected beating from the Confederate guns. They added whatever material they could to protect the parts of the superstructure and hull that had little to no iron plating. The upper deck of the ship was covered with lumber, cordwood, coal bags, lengths of chain and heavy hawsers. The sensitive areas of the ship exposed to the outside were also individually reinforced. Eighteen inches of cable and rope were coiled around the pilothouse, and heavy timber and iron were secured around the boilers and engine room. The final addition was a small barge loaded with coal and hay placed onto the port quarter. This served to protect the ship’s magazine and shell room, having little iron plating on the quarter and aft portion of the ship. The guns were brought inside the ship,

gun ports secured. The ship was unrecognizable at this point. Walke later described that the “*Carondelet* looked like a farmer’s team, preparing for market.”¹⁷¹ The other adjustment made to the *Carondelet* was that the engineers diverted the steam exhaust through the wheelhouse, instead of the normal path through the steam pipes leading to the flue caps and exhaust at the top of ship. The normal exhaust created a unique puffing sound that the crew wished to avoid.¹⁷²

As Foote had with his captains, Walke had asked for volunteers of his crew. Walke had only one crewmember decline the opportunity to run the batteries out of his 251 sailors. The replacement for that crewmember was volunteer William Hole, the First Master of the *Cincinnati*. Hole was an experienced river man, whose twenty-one years working on the Mississippi River included 194 trips to New Orleans prior to his extended transit with the Western Gunboat Flotilla. Hole would play a key role in the navigation of *Carondelet* through her impending transit. The other additions to the ship were twenty-four sharpshooters from Company H of the Forty-Second Illinois Regiment. Confederate boarding of *Carondelet*, by boat while underway, or from the shore should she run aground, was a real concern for Walke and the crew if they had a disabled ship during the transit. The sharpshooters would help defend the ship in case it was disabled or drifting. On top of the detachment of soldiers, the 251 sailors onboard *Carondelet* were armed to the teeth for the transit, as if they were beating to quarters with Lord Nelson in 1805. The crew had cutlasses, pistols, muskets, and boarding-pikes. The engineers also connected

¹⁷¹ Walke, *Naval Scenes*, 124.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 124, 130.

hot water hoses to the boilers, to direct a scalding stream of water at any unfortunate Confederate who got too close to the ship.¹⁷³ The ship and the crew were ready, now for the test of their preparations.

By 4 April, Rucker's Battery remained inoperable and the Confederates' floating battery stood two miles from where it had been originally. Bissell finally completed the canal to New Madrid. The canal allowed several shallow draft steamers to transit to New Madrid. They remained in the bayou, hidden, waiting for the time to transfer the Army of the Mississippi to Madrid Bend. The only piece left to finish what Pope started more than a month earlier were gunboats to protect the transports and defeat the Confederate shore batteries south of New Madrid. Walke told Foote of his intention on commencing the transit to New Madrid the night of 4 April, and Foote concurred. The early environmental conditions of the afternoon looked benign, and the prevailing thought was that the ship might have to wait until after the moon set to begin. As night fell on 4 April though, the fortunes of Walke and the *Carondelet* took an initial turn in their favor. The wind shifted around 8:00 p.m., and foreboding clouds began to roll in. This meant the expedition could start earlier, and at 10:00 p.m., the *Carondelet*, its passenger barge, and extra sharpshooters weighed anchor.¹⁷⁴

After Walke and Hole talked to several local river pilots, they decided they would attempt to stay as close to the Missouri side of the river as possible through the transit, though the *Carondelet* in her bulkier form would be harder to maneuver down the river

¹⁷³ Walke, *Naval Scenes*, 128-129.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

with the strong following current. The growing storm consumed the night, helping the transit start smoothly. The night was inky black, described by a sailor of the flotilla “as having had a darkness that could almost be felt.”¹⁷⁵ The first mile was startlingly quiet, until the silence was broken not by the Confederate gunners, but by five foot flames shooting out of the exhaust briefly. The unintended consequence of redirecting the exhaust was that a buildup of soot occurred on the flue caps near the exhaust outlet. With that exhaust outlet not being used, the soot built up enough that periodically (twice during the transit) there was enough soot such that that the heat from the furnace twenty feet below ignited it and let out a fireball from the exhaust piping. It was not until after the second eruption from the exhaust that Confederate gunners finally awoke, as *Carondelet* was broadside to the first operational battery northeast of Island Number Ten. The first to see the transiting ship sent up five red flares, and slowly the sentinels and batteries stirred and began to show signs of activity. Once sighted, the *Carondelet* increased its speed to all ahead full. Any issues of quiet steaming were now moot.¹⁷⁶

As the Confederate batteries began to open up on the small warship, the *Benton*, *Pittsburgh*, and mortars threw the weight of their shot and shell into the engagement. Any chance of inhibiting the Confederate gunners was of benefit to the *Carondelet*. Even with the lightning and exhaust fireball issues, the *Carondelet* had to be a difficult target to hit

¹⁷⁵ Eliot Callender, “What a Boy Saw on the Mississippi,” in *Military Essays and Recollections: Read Before the Illinois Commander of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, vol. 1, ed. Charles Davis (Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1891), 56.

¹⁷⁶ Walke, 130.

with the ship as close to the Missouri shore as possible.¹⁷⁷ It would have been difficult for the Confederate gunners to get the correct angle to depress their guns to hit the ship while transiting. Whether those circumstances are valid for the accuracy shortcomings of the gunners or not is debatable, but the shore and island batteries did not hit the *Carondelet* once while it was under thirty minutes of sustained fire. Thirty-four guns were active at the upper batteries and island. Rucker's guns were spiked and the floating battery engaged the *Carondelet* separately.¹⁷⁸ There are widely differing accounts of how many rounds the thirty-four guns expended, with none given by the Confederates in their official reports. It seems like a poor showing for fortifications whose whole purpose was to deter such a transit. The circumstances played out in the Union favor, as Foote and Walke had intended. After a month or more at those batteries, the Confederate gunners, with a brigadier general in command, should have thought through and practiced a night scenario.

After clearing the western tip of Island Number Ten and opening from the effective ranges of the batteries there, the *Carondelet* continued towards the floating battery and New Madrid. Walke later thought that the floating battery appeared to be under the impression that *Carondelet* intended on attacking them because the battery did not engage *Carondelet* until after the ship was past and opening. The battery fired seven or eight shots at the ship, but none came close to the ship due to how long the

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 130-131.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 130-133.

Confederates waited to engage.¹⁷⁹ *Carondelet* then progressed to New Madrid, securing to the bank near the town at 1:00 a.m.

During the intense three-hour transit, even with the periods of Confederate shelling, the most perilous moments were early on in the transit. First Mate Hole oversaw the rudder orders for the ship, with Walke overall in charge. Boatswains Mate Wilson and Masters Mate Gilmore were on the forecastle of the ship to take soundings of the water depth in front of the ship with a lead line. At one critical point early in the shelling, Gilmore reported that the ship was about to run aground. Hole then gave the command of hard to port. The ship veered off the side of the river bottom, but did not run aground. Gilmore gave a report of no bottom a few moments later, signaling the ship was back in safe waters, but the *Carondelet* narrowly escaped catastrophe.¹⁸⁰ The *Pittsburgh* duplicated the *Carondelet*'s feat two nights later, and the Union Navy later ran the formidable batteries at Vicksburg over the next sixteen months numerous times. These examples and the lack of damage taken by *Carondelet* and later *Pittsburgh* should not take away from the singularly courageous action of this first undertaking. There were no guarantees for Walke and his crew about their survival on the night of 4 April, and they had the added pressure that the entire operation against the Confederates, and progress down the Mississippi in general, hinged on their success.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁸⁰ W. H. C. Michael, "The Mississippi Flotilla," in *War Sketches and Incidents. Papers Read by Companions of the Commandery of the State of Nebraska, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, vol. 1, ed. Horace Ludington (Omaha, NE: Burkley Print Company, 1902), 132.

The Capture of Madrid Bend and Island Number Ten

After the evacuation of New Madrid, the Confederate leadership consisting of McCown, Polk, and Beauregard moved forward in a confusing and often contradictory manner. Polk initially congratulated McCown for safely extracting his forces from New Madrid. Beauregard then ordered McCown on 18 March to leave the amount of artillery personnel and infantry regiments to operate the guns and defenses at Island Number Ten and Madrid Bend. He also ordered McCown to take the remaining regiments and proceed with them down the river to Fort Pillow, turning the command at Island Number Ten over to Brigadier General Walker. This course of action was a departure from the previous sentiments that Beauregard and Polk communicated to McCown. They made it clear to hold the location no matter what, but plans and priorities obviously changed. What seems strange is that McCown was ordered back to command the garrisoned troops at the island and Madrid Bend two days later. McCown left on 19 March and was then back at Madrid Bend on 21 March. The intent of the reversal is not clear, but what is clear is that McCown's tone and language to Polk and Beauregard became increasingly desperate after the New Madrid evacuation on 14 March. Correspondence between Polk and Beauregard discussed their concerns with the despairing language he was using when describing how he was going to implement the orders they were giving him. These discussions make his resumption of command even harder to understand, but it would not matter for long. Beauregard would give the order less than a week after McCown

resumed command for Brigadier General William Mack all to relieve him in command of the forces defending Island Number Ten.¹⁸¹

Brigadier General William Mack all was a Maryland native and an 1837 West Point graduate. He was wounded during the Seminole War, and brevetted twice during the Mexican War.¹⁸² He had been General Albert Sydney Johnston's and then Beauregard's Adjutant General before relieving McCown. Mack all arrived at Madrid Bend on 1 April. In his first correspondence with Beauregard he reported that Brigadier General Walker and one of his colonels were out sick, Brigadier General Gantt had handed in his resignation, the Confederate gunboats were not worth the wood they were built from, and that he had only 3475 soldiers to defend the area.¹⁸³ That quick snapshot, gave only a small part of the story. His first detailed report from 3 April was more reflective of how he assessed the command's situation. Mack all states that after going through accurate daily reports, he had only 2273 infantry soldiers that were armed, healthy, and present. With his requirements in supporting guards and batteries over a nearly twenty-five mile area he could not bring more than 1000 soldiers to bear at any given point in opposition of a landing force. He also addressed the spiking of Rucker's Battery, identifying the cowardly nature of the sentries and that an investigation was underway. He talked of the shelling of the floating battery and the necessity to move it.

¹⁸¹ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 790-805.

¹⁸² Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 203-204.

¹⁸³ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 807.

To his displeasure, the floating battery was still under the jurisdiction of the Navy, which did not allow him to move its fourteen guns to shore where he felt they would be safer.

Most importantly, Mack all gave an overall assessment of the command and soldiers there. He states very clearly that one good regiment would be better than what he had, and that this force had never had discipline. The force was disheartened, apathetic, and he felt no faith in the sentinels or guards. He asked for neither reinforcements nor aid. Beauregard just needed to understand the situation, and Mack all knew that Beauregard would judge the value of the place and capacity to support it best from his standpoint as department commander. Mack all also estimated that he would not be able to hold out for more than ten hours if Pope managed to land his force at Madrid Bend or Tiptonville.¹⁸⁴ It was an intelligent and emotionless assessment that showed the officer's understanding of the department commander's perspective and responsibilities. It was also the first and last honest and accurate report that came from New Madrid and Island Number Ten.

Carondelet was underway early on the morning of 5 April after its previous night's successful exploits. Walke took on Colonels Granger and Smith and reconnoitered from Madrid Bend down to Tiptonville, probing and harassing six small batteries the Confederates had erected over the first few days in April.¹⁸⁵ The batteries were not an issue for the *Carondelet* or the other ironclads, but could disable or sink one of the transports if they came close enough. After the identification of the enemy batteries along the Tennessee shore, Pope requested another gunboat to execute his crossing in the

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 809.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 667.

face of the Confederate batteries and opposition.¹⁸⁶ Foote put up a fight, sighting the same apprehensions he had stated previously to all parties about the grave dangers to his ships, but only delayed the additional gunboat by one day. Any complaints or concerns from Foote at that point rang hollow after the success of *Carondelet*. *Pittsburgh* ran the batteries on the night of 6 April, in a similar fashion to *Carondelet*, also untouched by the Confederates guns. The two ironclads were ready on the morning of 7 April to engage the Confederate batteries and support the crossing of the Army of the Mississippi.¹⁸⁷

Pope chose an area on the northern portion of Madrid Bend called Watson's Landing to land his Army. The name referred to the family of the lone house in the area. At 6:30 a.m., the *Carondelet* got underway, with the *Pittsburgh* following behind. They attacked four batteries of one and two guns erected in vicinity of Watson's Landing. First, the two ships shelled the largest battery, with two 64-pound howitzers, for an hour before the ships drove the gun crews and supporting troops off. Crewmembers of the *Carondelet* then went ashore and spiked the two guns. This process was then repeated at three other single-gun batteries over the next two hours.¹⁸⁸ Once completed, Walke made the predetermined signal to Pope and the Army of the Mississippi began its invasion of Madrid Bend. By noon on 7 April, Pope's division under Brigadier General Paine landed at Madrid Bend and created a lodgment to facilitate the landing of the rest of the Army of Mississippi. By 7:00 p.m., three divisions of infantry, a cavalry battalion, and three

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 660.

¹⁸⁷ U.S. War Department, *ORN*, vol. 22, 724.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 727.

artillery batteries safely landed on the Tennessee shore.¹⁸⁹ The Forty-Third and Sixty-Third Ohio Regiments were the first Union force to land. They formed a line of battle and advanced on the Confederate camp inland of Watson's Landing. What they found was an evacuated camp with only the sick remaining.¹⁹⁰

Mack all had attempted to pull his forces south from the island and Madrid Bend once it was clear that Pope was going to land his forces. The Confederate Eleventh Arkansas had been encamped outside of Watson's Landing supporting what they called Watson's Battery. They received orders from Mack all to march to Tiptonville, where they thought they would be forming for a concerted fight with the Union forces. They reached Tiptonville that afternoon, and set up in defensive positions. They formed a line of battle there as the sun set that night, expecting an attack at any time.¹⁹¹ A similar account from the First Alabama recalled confusion as the regiment was hastily ordered south from northern Tennessee batteries, first to proceed to the area across from Point Pleasant, then to Tiptonville. The First Alabama was also under the impression they were preparing for a fight as the day passed to night on 7 April.¹⁹²

As the Confederates retreated, the *Carondelet* and *Pittsburgh* transited south to Tiptonville after the transports began to land their cargoes safely. Their purpose was to attack the southern-most Confederate batteries at Tiptonville and to stop any Confederate

¹⁸⁹ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 669-670.

¹⁹⁰ Jackson, 52.

¹⁹¹ Poe, *Raving Foe*, 32.

¹⁹² Edward Young McMorries, *History of the First Regiment, Alabama Volunteer Infantry* (Montgomery, AL: The Brown Printing Company, 1904), 37-38.

gunboats from aiding or transporting the Confederate forces.¹⁹³ The Army of the Mississippi formed up for the march from Watson's Landing to Tiptonville that afternoon as their transports debarked and then proceeded south in pursuit of the Confederate forces. Brigadier General Paine's division was the vanguard of Pope's forces, arriving outside of Tiptonville at 10:00 p.m. on 7 April. The Army of the Mississippi bivouacked that night, surrounding Tiptonville.¹⁹⁴ *Carondelet* and *Pittsburgh* now cut off any escape from the river with the Confederate gunboats three miles south committed to not engaging the ironclads.¹⁹⁵ The land south of Tiptonville was so flooded at the time that for the Confederate forces to escape south they would have to wade through six feet high water.¹⁹⁶ Mackall's small force was surrounded; his only available options were an overmatched fight or surrender.

Mackall's estimate to Beauregard of being able to hold out for no more than ten hours was more accurate than he would have liked. In command of these forces less than a week, Mackall later recalled that in the command's position, "Resistance and escape were alike hopeless."¹⁹⁷ At 4:00 a.m. on 8 April, the Confederate forces now massed at Tiptonville stacked their arms, and surrendered to the Army of the Mississippi. The forces abandoned at Island Number Ten had actually surrendered to Flag Officer Foote

¹⁹³ Walke, *Naval Scenes*, 177.

¹⁹⁴ Clyde C. Walton, ed., *Private Smith's Journal: Recollections of the Late War* (Chicago, IL: R. R. Donnelley and Sons Company, 1963), 31-32.

¹⁹⁵ Read, 340.

¹⁹⁶ U.S. War Department, *OR*, vol. 8, 670.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

the afternoon of 7 April. The Flotilla Brigade led by Colonel Buford took possession of the island that evening. The capture of the Island and Confederate troops was complete, with no loss of life on the Union side on 7 April. Pope reported that he had captured 6000 prisoners including three generals, 123 pieces of heavy artillery, thirty pieces of field artillery, and 7000 small arms of various types.¹⁹⁸ The Confederates sank three transports along with the gunboat *Grampus*. The floating battery had drifted ashore after the departing Confederates had cut its mooring cables in haste. The *Mound City* also captured the Confederate steamer *Red Rover* in which it recovered a copy of the Confederate signal book, a modified version of the Union set of codes used between ships for covert communications.¹⁹⁹

In one of the unique periods in the Civil War, these six weeks of operations had only seen sporadic fighting along with minimal casualties. The operation was strategically significant, with the Union opening the Mississippi to Memphis and later Vicksburg. The operational level of war saw the influence of the Confederate river defensive strategy, the impact of Shiloh, and the limitations of Polk himself. While the actual combat is limited, the tactical lessons in personal or unit courage and leadership at every level throughout the operations. These factors intertwine to paint the picture of the root causes of this important outcome.

¹⁹⁸ Pope, 57.

¹⁹⁹ Milligan, 59.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF THE OUTCOME AT NEW MADRID AND ISLAND NUMBER TEN AT THE STRATEGIC, OPERATIONAL, AND TACTICAL LEVELS OF WAR

It is impossible to distill the cause of the outcome of the operations at New Madrid and Island Number Ten into one element. By viewing the root causes at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war, a mosaic can be constructed to show how the forces identified in these layers shaped the end state of the operations.

Outcome Root Cause: Strategic

At the strategic level, the root cause for the outcome was the flawed application of the Confederate strategy for defending the Mississippi River. The river fortification strategy itself could appear questionable in light of the eventual opening of the Mississippi by the Union forces. The main problem challenging the fortification strategy was that there were few good options for generals Polk and A. S. Johnston in 1861 given their limited resources and the political pressure to fortify the entire South from anticipated Union incursions. The coastal fortification model that they applied to the Mississippi, Tennessee, and Cumberland Rivers was as good as anything else they could have employed under the circumstances. The application of this strategy on the Mississippi was the flawed aspect, not the strategy itself.

The Confederates spent substantially more time and resources on the northern Mississippi fortifications of Columbus, Fort Pillow, and Vicksburg than were invested at New Madrid and Island Number Ten. Vicksburg's natural defenses and location with respect to important rail lines made it an easy choice to put as much work into fortifying

as possible. Columbus and Fort Pillow must have seemed like superior geographic locations with respect to their locations on the river. Columbus sat atop a commanding height on the Kentucky side of the river, fifteen miles south of the Union base at Cairo to check the Union movement southward. Fort Pillow was north of Memphis, protecting the vital southern city if the other fortifications fell, also with a commanding location elevated above the river.

Island Number Ten and New Madrid were at a relatively obscure location that was not close to any important piece of infrastructure like the other locations. The natural defenses of the place were strong, but unique compared to the imposing elevation of the other locations. The Confederate leadership possibly overlooked New Madrid and Island Number Ten's potential as the vital strongpoint north of Vicksburg due to the lack of a commanding height and the large area to defend between Island Number Ten and New Madrid. Of those four fortifications, the only two fortifications attacked via land were Vicksburg and Island Number Ten. The Confederates evacuated the other two fortifications because they became vulnerable via the land approached to the east. Vicksburg had a 30,000-soldier garrison and the fortifications to withstand an eastward investment. Island Number Ten and New Madrid were safe from an eastern attack because of the protection of Reelfoot Lake and the surrounding vast swampy lowlands.

Today, joint and Army planning processes address shortcomings about understanding the operational environment and identifying vulnerabilities. Such processes can aid in our evaluation of the efficacy of the actions of military and political leaders in the past. The joint operational design process, similar to the Army Design Methodology, aids staffs and leaders in identifying the correct problem that is driving the

planning process.²⁰⁰ Both processes force planners to identify relationships of actors and influences connected to the current and desired end state. The process also helps to identify possible vulnerabilities when looking at the problem between the current and end state, and the operational approach developed to address the problem.

Polk had no formal planning process when developing the strategy for the defense of Confederate Department Number Two and the Mississippi River. He had a staff of limited experience and, critically, few engineers working for him. They also had a limited knowledge of the vast area they defended. There were no accurate topographical maps of New Madrid and Island Number Ten area, which had no important infrastructure like railroads to motivate the creation of detailed maps prior to the war.

The Confederates failed to appreciate the vulnerability of their fortifications under the circumstances of a Union incursion south via the Tennessee or Cumberland Rivers. This connection should have resulted in an investment of experience and resources into fortifying New Madrid and Island Number Ten for six months instead of six weeks. A properly led garrison of 15,000 soldiers in an appropriately provisioned and fortified position around Island Number Ten would have done more to stop the southward expansion of the Union than the other fortifications combined.

The Confederate forces at Port Hudson, Louisiana guarded the southern approach to Vicksburg via the Mississippi. Port Hudson was on an 80-foot embankment on the east side of the Mississippi north of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Swamps and bayous also

²⁰⁰ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 2016), III-2; U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, March 2010), 3-1, 3-2.

surround Port Hudson, sharing some of the geographic attributes of New Madrid and Island Number Ten. The Confederate force at Port Hudson of 7000 soldiers was able to create extensive earthworks on the landward side of the town and river fortifications composed of twenty-four heavy guns.²⁰¹ The Confederates held out against Union Major General Nathaniel Banks' force of 30,000 soldiers and Rear Admiral David Farragut's eight-ship squadron for sixty-one days between May and July 1863.²⁰² The eventual surrender of Port Hudson came only after the surrender of Vicksburg made it clear the Confederates had no reason to hold out any longer.

A larger force and greater fortifications at New Madrid and Island Number Ten may not have stopped the joint Union forces forever, but could have held out as Port Hudson did. The resource priority of New Madrid and Island Number Ten should have been above Columbus and Fort Pillow through the planning process. This strategic failure to identify the correct fortification priority was a direct cause of the Confederate defeat.

Outcome Root Causes: Operational

The root causes for the outcome at New Madrid and Island Number Ten at the operational level of war can be broken into two categories: the overmatch in troops and equipment between the Union and Confederate leadership at the operational level. One of the operational root causes of the outcome at New Madrid and Island Number Ten was

²⁰¹ Edward Cunningham, *The Port Hudson Campaign 1862-1863* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 70-72.

²⁰² Paul Francois Gournay, *Defending Port Hudson*, In *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 5, ed. Peter Cozzens (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 392-396.

the overwhelming advantage that the Union forces had in soldiers, sailors, and equipment on hand in the theater. The Army of the Mississippi and Foote's flotilla had a three-to-one advantage in soldiers, twice as many light and heavy guns, superior gunboats, and open interior supply lines. Even so, there are several examples of outnumbered Confederate forces defeating a superior Union force during the Civil War.

Chancellorsville is a stark example, where the Federal Army of the Potomac outnumbered the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia by nearly 40,000 soldiers. General Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia won in spectacular fashion against the Union forces that outnumbered them. Comparing Chancellorsville to Island Number Ten is more than a stretch, but the point remains that relative troop strength did not always carry the day. McCown's and then Mackall's force had neither the leadership nor continuity to overcome their three-to-one numbers disadvantage. The Confederate necessity to disperse its troops to attempt to defend the entire area from Island Number Ten to Tiptonville and by the substantial Confederate sick list that persisted throughout the operations compounded the Union Army advantage in numbers. The product of these factors was that a Union advantage of three-to-one grew to six- or seven-to-one at any given tactical point after the evacuation of New Madrid. The Confederate gunboats were not outnumbered, but outclassed. They ran from the prospect of fighting the Union ironclads, allowing two Union gunboats to become a force multiplier for the Army of the Mississippi. This regimental and ironclad deficit on the Confederate side eventually proved insurmountable.

From the beginning of the Army of the Mississippi's push towards New Madrid at the end of February, the Union had efficiently operating supply lines that the

Confederacy proved unable to interdict. The Federal Army and Navy forces had internal lines over land and water that were secure throughout the operations. The quartermaster and commissary officers had access to what they needed to supply the force with sustenance and ammunition without any of the obstacles that other forces saw operating on exterior lines in the Confederacy's territory.

The geographic factors that made the Confederate location on the Mississippi such a potential strength also limited their options for resupply as the Union pushed south. With the river and surrounding swampy lowlands at such a high level in the spring of 1862, access to Madrid Bend and Island Number Ten was limited to the river. The only large shipments of supplies came from Memphis over the river. Small skiffs and flat bottom boats could move over Reelfoot Lake or south of Tiptonville, but these could not sustain large, continuous shipments. As the Union forces took New Madrid and extended south to Point Pleasant and Riddles Point, the evolution became more difficult by the day. The Confederate troops had ammunition and food shortages the last three weeks of the operations. The Federals' superior force size and logistical advantages were the basis for the overmatch that was one of the root causes for the outcome of Island Number Ten at the operational level.

The Confederate leadership at the operational level before and during the operations at New Madrid and Island Number Ten helped to seal the fate of the 6000 Confederates who eventually surrendered. Polk sent a collection of inexperienced and marginally capable leaders to the area, with little initial guidance for its defense. He also paid the area no personal attention, which would have taken no more than a day from his command at Columbus. Polk and later Beauregard both sent mixed messages about

priorities to the commanders at New Madrid and Island Number Ten. Polk and Beauregard told McCown to hold out until the last, but did not support the area with the necessary regiments and resources. Beauregard at one point used the imagery of Thermopylae to convey his expectation to McCown. This was a ridiculous attitude in light of the leaders and resources employed in the area. The conflicting messages from higher headquarters made things even worse over the last two weeks of March. The sequence of recall, reinstatement, and relief by Mackall only hurt the tactical situation. All of this miscommunication reflected the poor leadership at the strategic and operational level for the Confederates during the fall of 1861 and spring of 1862. This poor leadership had a distinct impact on the command climate under McCown and set McCown and his inexperienced subordinates up for failure.

Outcome Root Cause: Tactical

The root causes for the outcome at New Madrid and Island Number Ten at the tactical level of war are broken down into two categories: the Union and Confederate leadership at the tactical level, and the will to fight of both sides.

Major General John Pope's Civil War legacy is marred by his time at the head of the short-lived Army of Virginia and the disastrous result of the Battle of Second Manassas, Virginia, in late August 1862. Whatever his performance in command after April 1862, he performed effectively at the head of the Army of the Mississippi. The Confederates made this an operation that was Pope's for the losing. Even with the Confederate shortcomings, Pope showed the ability to effectively organize and control his force as it grew. He also identified capable and talented commanders that he trusted for his divisions and brigades. He had some beneficial aspects to his force structure that

he ably exploited that were due to how early in the war the operations took place. Pope had new, large regiments. The Union states' process of creating new regiments instead of filling new bodies in old regiments meant that later in the war a Union regiment may have 300 or 400 soldiers after combat losses compared to the a new regiment of around 1000 soldiers. This allowed Pope to task organize into divisions with a brigadier general who was Regular Army (other than Brigadier General Palmer), commanding two brigades of two large regiments. This made the ratio of experienced division and brigade commanders to regiments higher than later battles. This aided Pope in his ability to create a plan and rely on his senior leaders to implement it throughout the Army of the Mississippi.

The one negative aspect to Pope's time at the head of the Army of the Mississippi was how he dealt with Flag Officer Foote and the Navy. Here he reflects the stereotype of inter-service squabbling, coming across bitter and condescending when reporting on Foote's reluctance to act in support of his forces. He made no real attempt to make a personal connection with Foote as Grant had in the previous several months. Pope's use of Bissell as an emissary did not help develop the relationship between the two organizations.

Some of Pope's feelings toward Foote are understandable. Foote was a very likable character who always seemed to set an upright example for those around him. Unfortunately, he had a degraded mental state by the start of the operations above Island Number Ten, to the point that he was nearly ineffective in his role leading the squadron. The circumstances of the environment and the perceived capability gap that he saw between the river defenses and his ships paralyzed him. Foote had witnessed the strengths

and weaknesses of his gunboats firsthand at Forts Henry and Donelson. The lack of effectiveness of the gunboats and casualties incurred at Donelson left him physically and emotionally scarred. The most significant technological advantage that the Union posed against the Confederates was the ironclads. They were more than a match for the Confederate shore batteries and wooden gunboats. Foote wasted the better part of three weeks worrying and complaining to Welles and others about why he could not accomplish anything. This timid execution single handedly held back the Union operations more than any Confederate capability. It is unlikely to imagine how the successful naval leaders of the day like Rear Admiral David Glasgow Farragut or Foote's eventual successor Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter might have operated in Foote's place.

On the Confederate side, Brigadier General McCown is at the center of the Confederate leadership shortcomings at the tactical level. During the first month he was in command, McCown proved unable to effectively organize his forces and instill any kind of disciplined culture throughout the organization. The size of his area of responsibility was larger than anything he previously commanded. These distances between troops and his subordinate leaders negatively influenced his ability to communicate effectively to his dispersed command. His lack of an experienced staff played into those shortcomings also. It is difficult to discern McCown's movements on a daily basis other than his initial assessment and the day of the evacuation of New Madrid. He gives the impression that outside of those two days that he was not personally interacting with his forces on a consistent basis through March. This could be a reflection of McCown's own leadership shortcomings, or his inexperience in command.

Brigadier General Stewart had as much or more experience than McCown, which may have actually hindered how McCown dealt with the forces at New Madrid. He gave Stewart and his brigade commanders a level of autonomy that the outcome at New Madrid seems to judge as excessive. Additionally, some of the more experienced Confederate troops under McCown occupied the batteries at Island Number Ten and Rucker's Battery under Brigadier General Trudeau. During March, McCown also avoided having an intrusive relationship with his subordinates there. McCown did not properly identify the capability and personalities of the leaders within his command. This led him to misjudge his time management priorities. He should have spent substantially more time with his forward leaders to ensure they were meeting his intent throughout the operations.

Brigadier General Mackall's assessment when he took over in early April was very damning of the organization that McCall developed. The lack of discipline and low morale were a direct reflection of the leadership throughout the organization, ultimately the responsibility of McCown. Tactically he deferred to his few engineers and artillery officers for the preparation of his fortifications and gun emplacements. This was not necessarily a problem, but his consistent disengagement from the soldiers and processes within his command allowed for a toxic environment to develop. The indicators of this environment were not readily apparent until the Union forces arrived. After that point, the brittle Confederate morale and command structure supported only the feeblest defense. The Confederates' embarrassing attempt at defending the key location was a reflection of McCown's tactical leadership failure during his time at New Madrid and Island Number Ten.

Brigadier General A. P. Stewart has an intriguing role throughout the narrative about New Madrid. He assumed command of the two fortifications, each with a brigade, totaling seven regiments in all. He assumed command at the beginning of March after most of the fortifications and force organization was complete. He then departed for Fort Pillow, detailed to another tasking after the evacuation of New Madrid. He was only at the command for two weeks. On paper, within the context of his future record in the Confederate Army, he seems to be the most talented officer on the Confederate side present during the operations. Stewart would move up the ranks, commanding brigades, divisions, and then a corps in the Army of the Tennessee under Joe Johnson and John Bell Hood.²⁰³ The only real correspondence remaining from Stewart is his report on the evacuation of New Madrid, discussed earlier. He seems an underutilized asset by the Confederate leadership. The writing of Stewart and McCown about each other gives at minimum a cool impression of their relationship. With all of the action unfolding at Shiloh around this time, Stewart may have been upset to be in the backwater of New Madrid as the real fighting was happening several hundred miles east. Whatever the case, the officer with the most potential and ability within the Confederate leaders at New Madrid and Island Number Ten had no little on the operations there.

Commodore Hollins was an antebellum naval officer similar to Flag Officer Foote, though with a less distinguished career prior to the outbreak of the war. Also, much like Foote, he identified his limited resources as his priority throughout these operations, rather than the local or departmental Army commander's priorities. He

²⁰³ Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 293-294.

supported the Army forces in the area when it was convenient or safe for his ships. The early impact of his gunfire support to New Madrid was crucial, but his forces had almost no impact after that. He drew the ire of every leader on the ground at Madrid Bend and Island Number Ten until the capture of the forces there. The cases of Foote and Hollins draws a picture of a timid, uncooperative, and unimaginative naval officer.

This small sample size does not do justice to the antebellum naval officers serving in the Civil War. There are several other Civil War examples of successful joint operations that had gallant and courageous naval officers. These included Roanoke, Mobile Bay, Vicksburg, and Fort Fisher. Foote demonstrated a different side of himself during his first few months of fighting alongside Grant, but was not the same after Fort Donelson. Conversely, Hollins had a much less distinguished career prior to and during the Civil War than Foote. Much like the defenses at New Madrid and their premature evacuation, it is unclear what impact Hollins and his gunboats could have had if they had been more aggressive throughout the period. The Confederate joint forces at New Madrid and around Island Number Ten inflicted few casualties on the Army of the Mississippi throughout the six-week operation. Had the Confederates made the process of taking New Madrid and the Tennessee side a bloodier ordeal, it may have changed Pope's calculus, or at least delayed operations to allow for reinforcements. In the end, Hollins let down the Confederate Army units and leaders he was supposed to be supporting. McCown and Hollins are the prime examples of the Confederate leadership failures at the tactical level.

The other tactical root cause for the outcome of Island Number Ten was the will of the leaders and troops on each side to fight and win. Even with the Confederate

advantages of fortified location, a frictional Union command structure, and Foote's timid conduct of operations, the Union forces eventually proved successful. Though short on actual combat compared to most Civil War operations, New Madrid and Island Number Ten have a collection of unique examples of soldiers and units' resourceful and courageous exploits that influenced the operations. The performance of Colonel Bissell and his Engineer Regiment of the West, Colonel Roberts and his spiking party, and Commander Walke and the *Carondelet* all reflect the collective will and initiative of the Union forces.

Conversely, the Confederate forces often took every opportunity to give up key terrain and withdraw without fighting. McCown and his leaders down to the regimental commander level did not exhibit any commitment to holding New Madrid or Madrid Bend/Island Number Ten. The lack of fighting and casualties on the Union side made it much easier for them to be creative and courageous during the operations. Had the Confederate forces made the inexperienced Army of the Mississippi bleed more over the first few weeks in March it may have affected the outcome. Brigadier General Mackall had few options once he took command late in the operations. However, the few reasonable options quickly turned into one of not opposing the Union movements at all. The Confederates put up no fight whatsoever after the Union troops began to land at Watson's Landing. The collective actions on the Union and Confederate sides displayed a sharp contrast in the will of the two forces to do what was necessary to fight and win.

Through the six-week period during from the end of February to early April in 1862, the Union forces did whatever they had to, while the Confederate leaders squandered the time and geography advantages that they held prior to 1862. The

collection of root causes at the strategic, operational, and tactical level produced one of the more lopsided ratios of captured soldiers to casualties during the war. Casualty numbers are not clear in official reports and other sources, but the Army of the Mississippi suffered approximately 100 casualties during the six-week operation. Actual numbers of Confederates captured also differ slightly between reports, but the approximate number is 6000. The only example larger than the sixty soldiers captured to one casualty ratio was the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox in April 1865.

The statistics tell only part of the story for these operations. The joint operations at New Madrid and Island Number Ten should be viewed in order of importance for Mississippi operations with Port Hudson. Vicksburg was the key point on the Mississippi for the Union to take. The only operation that defeated a significant fortification on the northern Mississippi and allowed for the northern incursion of joint Union forces was New Madrid and Island Number Ten. Port Hudson held joint Union forces from the south marching on Vicksburg. It would take Grant and David Dixon Porter operating in force over an eight-month period to take the key Mississippi strongpoint. Without the operations at Island Number Ten and New Madrid, the Mississippi would not have opened up to Memphis and Vicksburg. In this respect, the importance of the six weeks of operations in early 1862 along the Mississippi is often underappreciated. The bloodless nature compared to the action at Shiloh and later battles overshadow the maneuvering and personal heroics that defined the unique operations at New Madrid and Island Number Ten.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The Civil War had seminal moments within it that highlighted the progression of the war from 1861 to its conclusion in 1865. Battles and campaigns like Shiloh, Antietam, Chancellorsville, Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and the Overland Campaign (1864) represent this progression. The tenuous nature of the outcome of the war at different points throughout the conflict makes the events between those landmark battles and campaigns equally important, as the future of the Union was tenuous at times. This is the case with New Madrid and Island Number Ten, where an early-war campaign played a crucial role in the Union capture of the Mississippi River Valley, and in turn the overall war. These lesser-known operations were the connective tissue between the larger campaigns, giving nuance and detail to the larger narrative of the war. The analysis of the three levels of war brings to life the role of this campaign in the planning and execution of the Confederate defensive strategy for the Mississippi River, the impact of force management and logistics, and the personal actions of heroism that can determine short-term outcomes at the tactical level. The effective and ineffective examples of leadership throughout the levels also provide a lasting illustration valuable for current and future leaders' professional judgment.

The analysis of the misapplication of Confederate Mississippi River defensive strategy has two associated conclusions. First, the importance of the design and deliberate planning processes is evident in the Confederate end state at New Madrid and Island Number Ten. The failure of the Confederate leadership to identify correctly the priorities for fortification on the river made the effort of their subordinates on the operational or

tactical levels moot. Better support or leadership at New Madrid and Island Number Ten by the Confederates may have delayed the action for a small amount of time, but the planning errors doomed the location. The other strategic implication concerns each engagement, battle, or operation that has significance—the cumulative effect if you will. The casualties, scope, and one-sided outcome have left New Madrid and Island Number Ten operations generally overlooked. When viewed within the context of it being an important step towards the surrender of Vicksburg and Union control of the Mississippi, it proved very significant to enabling subsequent operations south in the larger Mississippi Valley. The Confederate leadership not only failed to prioritize these key fortifications, but also failed to understand the consequences of the fall of the area to the Federals in their overall strategy.

On the operational level, the root cause and the associated conclusion are the clearest from campaign inception to completion. The superior number of soldiers and the ability of the Union trains to keep Pope's soldiers and Foote's sailors supplied were decisive advantages. These advantages nested within the strategic objectives that identified priorities and orchestrated movements of armies. The superior Union execution in creating and supplying the Army of the Mississippi reflected the implementation of their strategy to take the Mississippi Valley from the Confederates. The poor operational support for McCown's forces was also a byproduct of the Confederates' limited resources. This did not allow the Confederate regional forces to support their tactical, operational, and strategic objectives.

The main tactical implication addresses the impact that individuals can have on the outcome of a tactical situation. Army or Navy strength and material advantages can

only take a force as far as they have the will to go. The six weeks of operations showed that this will to fight and win is present not only in individuals, but in entire units as well. The actions of Bissell, Roberts, and Walke not only made specific tactical gains during the operations, but they influenced the morale of the forces that surrounded them. This intangible gain from their actions affected the positive outlook of the Union troops, played a role in their motivation, and empowered their will to fight and win the operations they waged. The Confederates on the other hand were continuously demoralized as they evacuated, took continual artillery barrages, and then retreated without fighting. The importance of taking the initiative is not a new concept, but these entire individual and unit actions are examples of how junior commanders took the initiative in different ways to have far-reaching implications to the operations and campaign.

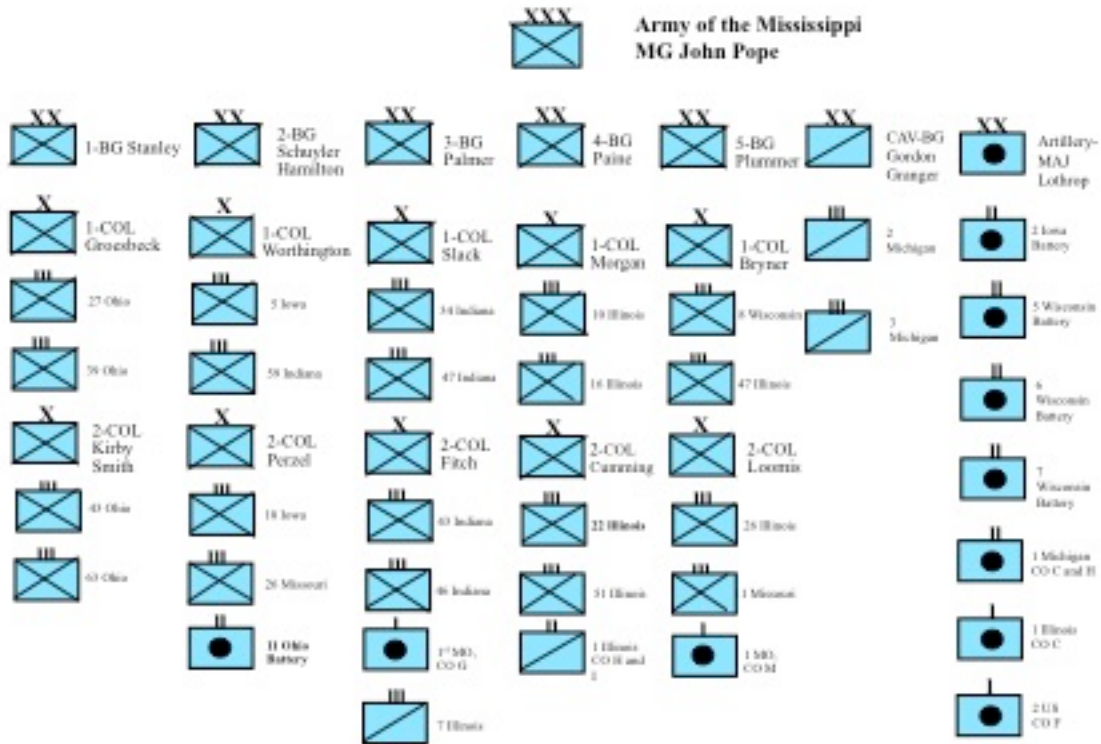
One final finding transcends the three warfare areas: leadership at every level influences the outcome of every battle, operation, and campaign. People do not intrinsically change over time. Understanding science, engineering, and culture may change, but the human experience is directly translatable to future generations. Even with the low casualties at New Madrid and Island Number Ten, there are lessons for leaders to identify and internalize. The leaders on both sides of the fighting during these operations had their experience, training, and understanding of history to use in the finite time at their disposal to make decisions. By viewing those leaders in combat, the lessons of making decisions under pressure while enduring the threat of death or dishonor are apparent. Internalizing those lessons is part of the preparation for future leaders to make

decisions that will stand up to the process of analysis in retrospect in the years after their action.

The Civil War has no shortage of good and bad examples to dissect and identify lessons and conclusions. In the over 150 years since 1865, all of the major U.S. wars have taken place on other countries' soil. It is difficult to conceive of a Civil War, with accessible battlefields and solely American combatants in the twenty-first century. Paradoxically, these factors make the struggle for the Union as applicable as ever, with enduring lessons and insights into the human experience that can still be seen in the action of American against American. New Madrid and Island Number Ten do not have the place in history or the National Military Park of a Vicksburg or Gettysburg. The undaunted Mississippi has also destroyed the Confederate fortifications at New Madrid and Island Number Ten itself. Even without these physical reminders of the action, the value of the operations and spirit of the American lives lost endures.

APPENDIX A

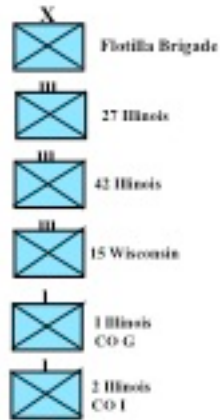
UNION ORDER OF BATTLE



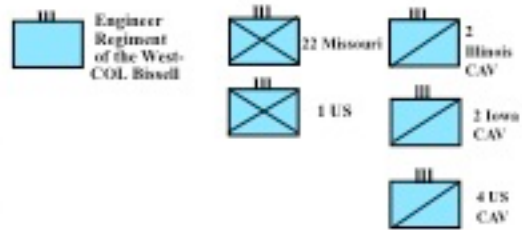
Union Forces at New Madrid/Island Number Ten, 4 March-7 April 1862

Source: U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1890-1901), 78-95, 589-590.

Flotilla Brigade
COL Nathaniel Buford Commanding



Unassigned Forces



Union Flotilla Brigade, 15 March-7 April 1862 and Unassigned
Forces at New Madrid, 4 March-7 April 1862

Source: U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1890-1901), 90-95.

Flag Officer Andrew Hull Foote Commanding

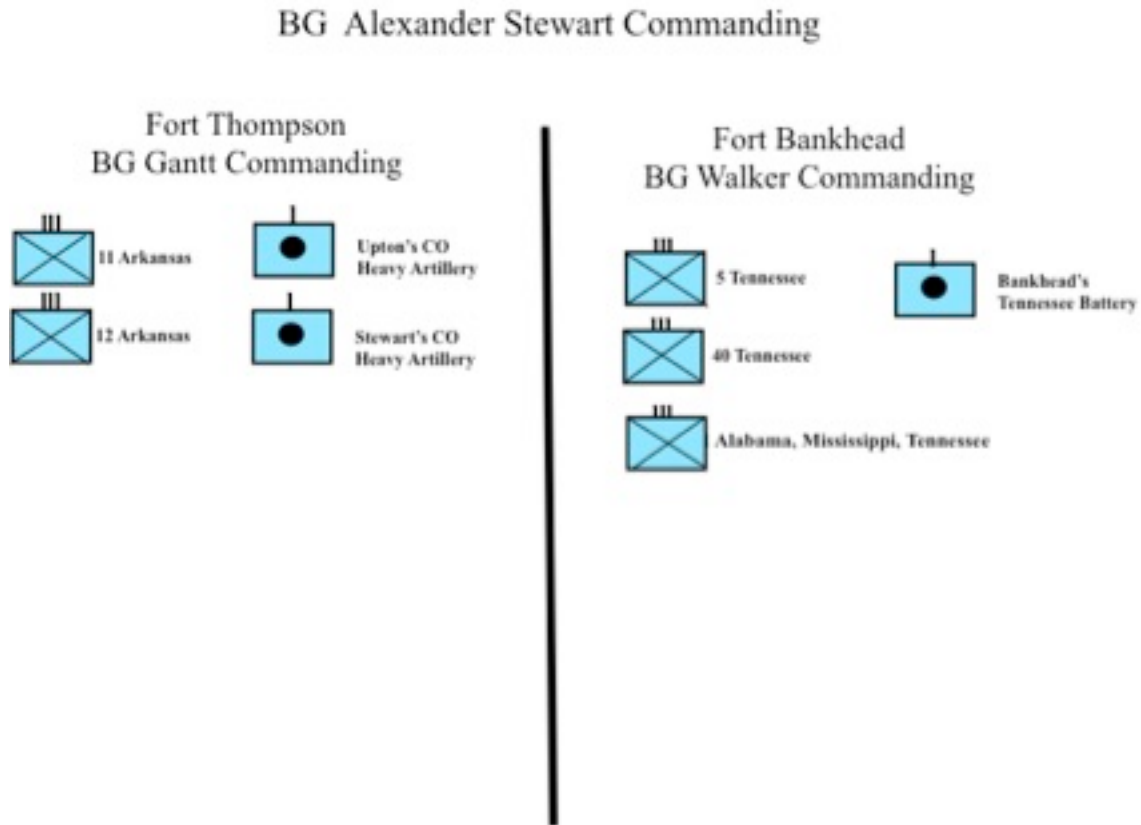
Ironclad Gunboats	Timberclad Gunboats	Mortar Boats
<i>Benton</i> <i>Louisville</i> <i>Cincinnati</i> <i>Mound City</i> <i>Carondelet</i> <i>Pittsburgh</i>	<i>Conestoga</i>	8 Mortar Boats

Union Navy at Island Number Ten, 15 March-7 April, 1862

Source: U.S. War Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, vol. 22 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1895-1929), 693-694.

APPENDIX B

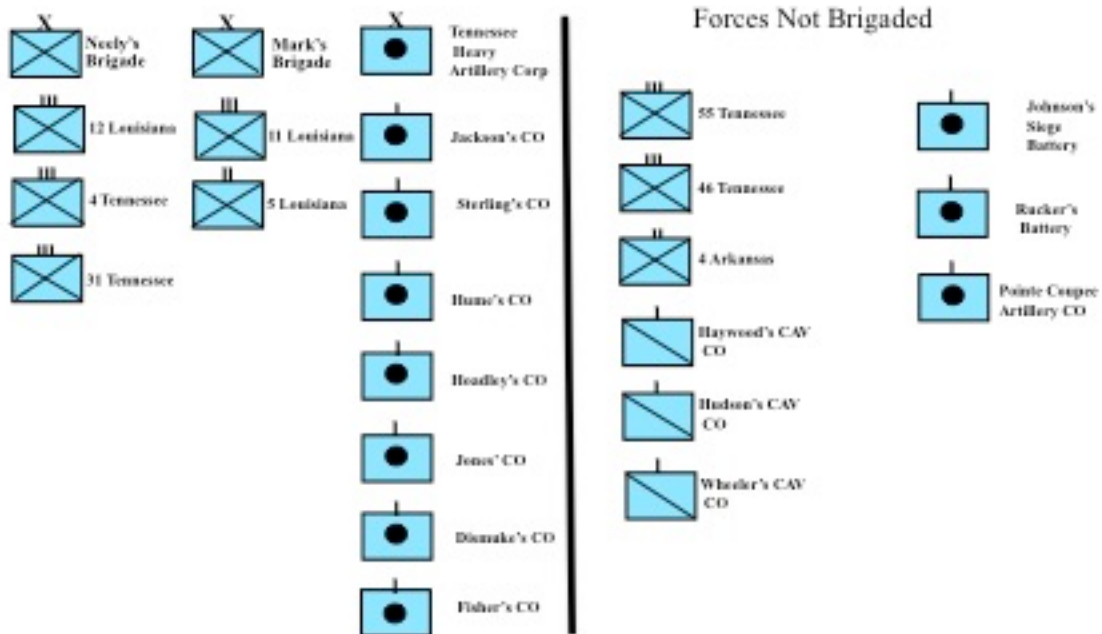
CONFEDERATE ORDER OF BATTLE



Confederate Forces at New Madrid, 1-14 March 1862

Source: U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1890-1901), 162-164, 762, 777.

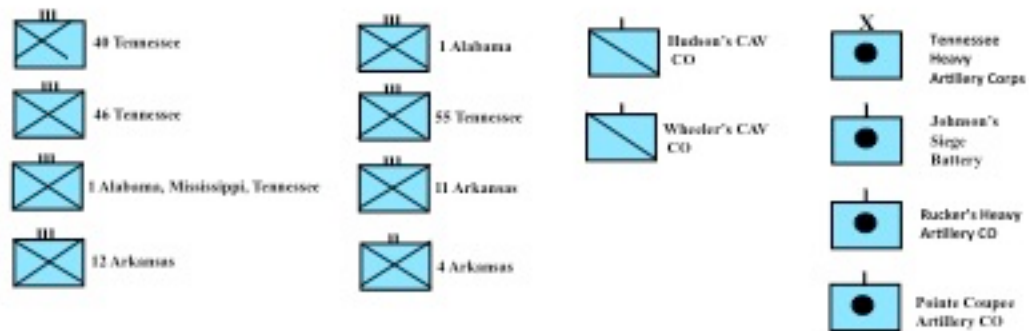
BG John McCown Commanding



Confederate Forces between New Madrid and Tiptonville, 1-21 March 1862

Source: U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1890-1901), 162-164, 174-175, 178-181.

BG John McCown Commanding, 21 March – 1 April
BG William Mackall Commanding, 1-7 April



Confederate Forces between Island Number Ten and
Tiptonville, 21 March-7 April 1862

Source: U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1890-1901), 795, 807, 132, 133.

Commodore George Hollins Commanding

Wooden Gun Boats

Livingston
Polk
McCrae
Pontchartrain
Marapaus
Jackson
Ivy

Floating Battery

New Orleans

Confederate Navy Forces Supporting New Madrid

Source: U.S. War Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, vol. 22 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1895-1929), 737, 745-746, 752.

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